

**THE TEXT IS FLY
WITHIN THE BOOK
ONLY**

**This book is with
tight
Binding**

914.7	C52
Chesterton	\$2.50
My Russian venture	
Fr 32	
Acc. No.	737302

914.7 C52

Keep Your Card in This Pocket

Books will be issued only on presentation of proper library cards.

Unless labeled otherwise, books may be retained for four weeks. Borrowers finding books marked, defaced or mutilated are expected to report same at library desk; otherwise the last borrower will be held responsible for all imperfections discovered.

The card holder is responsible for all books drawn on his card.

Penalty for over-due books 2c a day plus cost of notices.

Lost cards and change of residence must be reported promptly.



PUBLIC LIBRARY
Kansas City, Mo.

Keep Your Card in this Pocket

BERKOWITZ ENVELOPE CO., K. C., MO.

MY RUSSIAN VENTURE.

MY RUSSIAN VENTURE

BY

MRS CECIL CHESTERTON

AUTHOR OF

"IN DARKEST LONDON" "WOMEN OF THE UNDERWORLD"

ETC.

PHILADELPHIA

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

1931

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. "GREAT ARGUMENT ABOUT IT AND ABOUT"	9
II. WE CROSS THE RUBICON	30
III. MINSK—THE CITY OF SPRINGING HOPES AND DEAD HEARTS	51
IV. PROPAGANDA LONG—FOOD SHORT	71
V. WE TAKE THE OPEN ROAD	89
VI. THE OLD MOUJIK AND THE NEW	109
VII. A YOUNG COUNTRY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE	129
VIII. THE PERIL OF SOFT SEATS	152
IX. KIEV: THE BEAUTY OF A THOUSAND YEARS	171
X. THE COMMUNA HAS BEEN BORN—THE COM- MUNA WILL LIVE	190
XI. CONCERNING FEMININE VANITIES	212
XII. THE PENALTY OF INTELLECT	234
XIII. THE SOUL OF THE SOVIET	252
XIV. THE SHADOW OF THE ROBOT	263
XV. BACK TO THE OLD WORLD	274

MY RUSSIAN VENTURE

Chapter I

"GREAT ARGUMENT ABOUT IT AND ABOUT"

IN this, the century of cinema, when the privacy of the most cloistered city is ravaged by the public eye, the Russia of the films is pre-eminent. Her giant farms, teeming factories, and vast armies flood the screen with mechanized effort and fulfilment. But, though impressed, we are keenly conscious of how much remains unshown. In the throes of earth-shaking experiment, with humanity itself uprooted, Russia excites a persistent interest which the most inveterate propaganda for or against the Soviet cannot still. But for the most part curiosity is unassuaged; the most elaborate movie camera cannot reveal what we really want to know—the everyday life of the ordinary man and the ordinary woman.

For me, the desire to see Russia, her problems and successes, became a nostalgia of the mind. I could not visualize the true conditions through the pictures, by books or newspapers. The only way, I felt, was to find out for myself how her people exist, to try by actual contact to discover their hopes and their hardships, the angle from which the Russian peasant, with his immeasurable potentialities, views the world.

My difficulty was that I dislike proceeding in mass formation, with the inevitable crowd reactions which

prevent clear vision. The stereotyped tour to Moscow and Leningrad, personally conducted, neatly shepherded, and painfully supervised, did not attract me. My disposition moves to a more simple method of approach that leaves one free to follow less-frequented roads, uncover sudden beauties, secret springs. I longed to explore the wildest and most unfruitful, with the richest and most naturally favoured regions; to break away from the beaten track that since the Revolution has constrained critics and friends alike to make the capitals a measurement of failure and achievement by which the whole of the U.S.S.R. is judged, without consciousness or recognition of the hundred and forty odd millions far beyond the confines of city walls.

My plan was to push across the North-east Polish frontier straight into White Russia, with the poorest soil, the reddest Communism of any republic in the Union, and once there to follow the leadership of chance.

But it seemed that to wander thus unscheduled through the country was an impossible dream. The mere idea that I and a young friend hoped to go about entirely on our own precipitated a cloud of blood-red rumours, through which insatiable Ogpus with inscrutable ferocity dogged inoffensive travellers or shot them down at sight. Warnings and prophecies rained on me over the telephone, arrived in sheaves through the post. Friends and relatives remonstrated, people in authority protested, and the burden of their song was all the same—you may be robbed, you are sure to be imprisoned, you will never come back alive!

The Consulate of the U.S.S.R. were equally dis-

couraging, though for different reasons. If we liked to make an application we might get permission in six months' time to join a tourist party and proceed by Soviet ship to Moscow, where we should be shown the usual places of information and amusement, but to go alone, with only another woman—the Consulate remained stony and impervious.

It took us a week to get so far as the first refusal, however. The offices at Moorgate Street are full of the traditional atmosphere of sinister delay impressed on the inexperienced European mind by countless legends of the Russian secret police. The rooms are hung with posters, amazingly vivid in line and colour, of terrific tractors and retreating Kulaks, and you are received by a Bolshevik commissionaire in a shirt blouse and a correct but slightly ferocious manner. Time does not exist. You state your name, nationality, and business in writing and hope to get an audience with the Consul, and then you wait, and wait, and wait, until, tired of waiting, you go away and come again the next day.

My companion, however, affectionately known as Bunny, has an engaging way with her, and on the third morning she smiled at Cerberus and sweetly asked the Russian for “Hurry.” He had a remarkable face, that man; deep-set, sharp-seeing eyes, a dead-white skin, his straight mouth topped with a slight black moustache, gave the finishing touch to an appearance of cruelty that suddenly and amazingly vanished in a perfectly childlike smile. He would, I am sure, religiously and devotedly have consigned us to immediate

death had the Soviet so ordered, but meanwhile he reacted to a sense of fun and grew quite genial.

Things and people belonging to the U.S.S.R. that so often at first sight appear ferocious become quite kindly at close range!

Our friend—we called him 'the Gleam'—promised to put our papers before the Consul with the next batch. Meanwhile we sat and watched the gradually increasing crowd of unexpected people all seized with the desire to establish contact with the Soviet.

A young East-End Jew, who had forgotten the language of his forbears, asked permission for his grandfather, who lived at Charkov, to come and visit his family in Whitechapel. The old man, seventy-five and partially paralysed, was eager to see his descendants, who would send money for the journey and undertake to return their aged and remarkable relation after six weeks. He must have had an amazing constitution, that old man, and I hoped he would be able to start his journey very soon. But only in two months' time could his grandson hope to have an answer. Every permit to enter or to leave the country comes direct from Moscow; the local officials have no power to grant a visa. The Consulate, like the Embassy, is only a clearing-house for applications.

A genial German, trading in motor engines, was anxious to know the state of the food market. He had received his visa all right, but had heard that there was nothing to eat on the trains. Might he take provisions with him for the journey? I fear we put this down to national greediness, but as we subsequently

learned his apprehension was well-founded. There is neither time nor food on the Russian railway service!

Close on his heels came a Scots sea-captain who had taken a job in an Anglo-Russian whale-fisheries and was *en route* for Archangel. For the first time the Gleam was at a loss. He intimated to us that he spoke twelve languages, including Chinese and Korean, but that the Captain's was an unknown tongue. Our knowledge of Scotch is not entirely fluent, but we managed to gather that the poor man desired to register his passport photographs, of which he had brought a dozen. He was obviously disturbed, finding the atmosphere of the place alien to his admirably simple nature. He wanted to conform, but somehow he seemed to sense oppression.

The Gleam in crashingly broken English tried to put him at ease, and, taking three of the photographs, suggested with a grim humour that the remaining nine should be given to 'lady friends.'

The bewilderment of the Captain was indescribable. He felt, however, that he must accede to the customs of the Gleam's country, and forthwith handed out a photograph to every woman in the room. I still have mine. It shows a round face twinkling with health, a kindly pair of eyes, a shrewd mouth, and a quiet self-reliance. He had been at sea all his life, had won a decoration in the War, knew the Arctic Ocean as well as the Essex coast, and had spent some years in Vladivostok.

A complete personality; I see him pursuing his way

in the whale-fisheries, impervious alike to the Russian language and the Russian climate. Many countries may employ but none can absorb him. He remains indubitably, unshakably Scots.

During those days of waiting we all became impossibly confidential with each other. The Consulates of London are generally characterized by a uniform procedure, but here the Gleam in his shirt blouse dissipated all convention. And yet we were none of us quite happy. The ferocity of his steely eyes still remained in our minds, synchronizing with the violence of the posters on the walls.

A woman with a forlorn voice and a nondescript face suddenly made herself heard. She had been seated in a corner by the unlit stove, clinging, as it were, to the symbol of the household hearth, for several days, perpetually erupting with irrelevant questions and losing herself in a sea of tiresome documents; she was always overlooked, and generally inarticulate and incoherent. Now, however, she found her voice. Would the Gleam tell her why, please, there was still no news from her cousin who had married a Russian after the War and gone to the Ukraine? The cousin had written a year before to say she was ill, but since then no word had been received, and the silence was adversely affecting her mother's health, the health of her aunt, and the nervous condition of the entire household. Further details of the family followed, to which the Gleam turned an impervious ear, but still she babbled—querulous, disjointed. I have met them so often, these drab women, whose chief tie to life is a

distorted sense of grievance. You chance on them in the most out-of-the-way foreign parts, in the ante-rooms of Consulates, full of remote complaints, desiccated, injured, interminably communicative as to trivial personal affairs.

This particular specimen, I should say, was fifty years of age, with a tiny income, no occupation, and without any vital interest. The Gleam maintained an impassive demeanour, and presently, the trickle of trivialities dwindling away, she trailed down the stairs.

"To-morrow she will come again and then again," he said calmly. "She takes a form each day and fills it up never."

In face of his devastating patience I felt the least we could do was to resign ourselves to a further wait. But luck or Bunny was in our favour. The 'phone suddenly rang, the Gleam clicked to attention, and we were ushered into the Consul.

It is always, though most irrelevantly, disappointing to find that the power of veto resides in an unimpressive personality. The legend of the Centurion still, I suppose, decorates imagination, and it was with a pained surprise that I discovered the representative of 'Cæsar' Stalin to be a quiet, kindly, unassuming individual. His English was even more rudimentary than the Gleam's, but he gathered what we wanted to do, and promptly said we couldn't do it, at the same time handing us two of the longest and most official 'forms' I have ever seen. If we decided to go as tourists, and not to attempt our lonely expedition, they

could be filled in and returned with passport photographs the next day!

We accepted the forms—their possession was at least a step toward our final goal—and retreated in good order. The more they would not let us into Russia the more emphatically we determined to go. I never really believed we should fail. Given will, patience, and a sense of humour the walls of the most impregnable Jericho eventually fall down.

The *questionnaire* is primarily directed to discover the motive for wishing to visit the U.S.S.R. Has the applicant ever held land, houses, or shares in Russia—formerly known as —? Has he or she ever lived there? If so, the complexion of his or her politics during such residence? Further, the applicant has to supply the names of those willing to be ‘responsible’ if he or she should fall sick, run into debt, or become in any way a charge to the Soviet.

The forms filled in, we returned to Moorgate Street and permeated once more to the Consul. He accepted the documents, but seemed surprised and pained that we had not realized they were tourist forms when we still persisted that we wished to go alone. His English became more ragged, our understanding less acute—I have found that when dealing with officialdom an appearance of complete stupidity is sometimes quite effective! We reached a deadlock. He repeated ‘tourist,’ we continued to shake our heads. And then at last he had an inspiration. If we liked to pay the cost he would telegraph to Moscow so that we could get a decision from headquarters direct.

We handed over the necessary pound and felt that things were moving.

There followed days of intensive telephoning, continuous calling, and persistent but smiling interrogation as to the arrival of the wire from Moscow. But nothing happened, the Consulate remained indifferent, the Gleam grew hopelessly remote.

And then the ice broke. We were asked to go to the Soviet Embassy, Kensington Palace Gardens, and interview the Press *attaché*.

The difference between the Embassy and the Consulate is the distinction between the East and the West. Here are no strident posters, no suggestion of ferocity. You sweep through wide gates up the drive to the heavy doors, which open on a beautifully proportioned hall, leading to spacious apartments rich in Persian carpets, exquisite tapestries.

The Press *attaché* was young, vital, mentally keen, with perfect English. We gathered he had read our forms, but that he wished to get more detailed information. I explained that my interest in the Soviet centred in the giant farms, which, covering hundreds of acres, included innumerable families. He was courteously interested in my point of view, and I began to hope. And then again I was met by a *non possumus*. It was impossible for a journalist unaccompanied by an official guide to wander about the Soviet. It simply could not be done. Conditions in the interior were still unsettled, hotel accommodation was limited, transport, apart from the railways, irregular. Moreover, White Russia was considerably

behind the level of culture attained in other parts of the U.S.S.R. Very regretfully he must tell me our application could not be entertained just then.

But, as we discovered all through our Russian venture, though a main gateway may be barred you may often chance on a tiny opening through which to creep. Thus it happened that after much discussion I was asked if we could get recommendations from prominent people in London whose names were known to Moscow. It was even suggested in this stronghold of Communism where all caste is eliminated that the backing of a certain noble lord might lend weight to my request! I promised to approach the presence, but meanwhile time was the essence of necessity. Impervious to possibility of failure, we had already booked our passages on an Anglo-Polish steamer due to leave the Port of London for Danzig in three days.

It was then, I think, that for the first time he felt convinced that we were really serious in our intention. But pending the recommendations he could do nothing more. Once these were received he would wire to Moscow for the second time. And we might hope to find an answer awaiting us at Warsaw!

There followed two days of hectic intensity. District messengers, personal applications, were put in motion, and at last on Friday morning, within a few hours of setting sail, the necessary sponsors as to character and reputability were found. Mr Bernard Shaw, kindest of men, who had known and liked my husband, was willing to help me, as was a Cabinet Minister—without a title!

"GREAT ARGUMENT ABOUT IT"

Our last bolt was shot. We sent the letters to the Embassy and, armed with suitcases and optimism, boarded the S.S. *Warsawa* at Hay's Wharf, pursued by the headshakings of our friends, who considered the whole project mad and reprehensible!

Public opinion strengthened after we set sail. Indeed, the nearer we approached the land of our desires the more tangible grew the adverse criticism of the country. Everything seemed to converge to the same point, and though we never mentioned our intended destination, the conversation always seemed to drift there.

The Captain, a tall, upstanding Pole, with an implacable strength and a charming manner, had served in the Russian Navy, and told us creepy stories of weevily bread and bloody mutinies; a former correspondent for a London daily, returning after thirty years' absence to renew his acquaintance with Riga, was much occupied with the Bolshevik menace; the widow of a Russian captain, impoverished by the Revolution, was consumed with anger not so much for the Soviets as against Great Britain for acknowledging them. Mme Elvira was a charming person, and in her less impassioned moments talked delightfully of the pre-War grandeur of St Petersburg, the Russian Ballet, and the Tsar, until the glories of the Winter Palace and the opera glowed freshly coloured in her regretful ecstasy.

It is a lazily pleasant journey through the North Sea, the Kiel Canal, across the Baltic, up the mouth of the Vistula, and so to the old Hansa town. Not long

enough for tedium, the three days and a half are a soothing respite from telephones and traffic, and you have only to drift through a pleasing succession of agreeable meals with intervals for conversation, mild athletics, dancing, and repose.

It was good to watch the water, blue and impudently sparkling, as though such things as battles, wrecks, submarines, and mines had never been.

And then suddenly with an ineffaceable vividity the first time I had made this journey from England to Danzig came back to me. In February 1919, when the fate of Poland was hanging in the balance, I was sent to Warsaw as special correspondent. The Continental frontiers were shut, and the only possible access to the country was *via* Danzig. But normal traffic through the North Sea—still unswept—was entirely suspended, and it was only by the kindness of Admiral Sims of the U.S.A. that I was able to sail—the only passenger—in the American man-o'-war *Westward Ho!* bound for Poland with a relief cargo of flour.

Aboard the cosy *Warsawa* I relived those days of icy cold and dread expectancy—a fortnight from Falmouth to Danzig, feeling every inch of our perilous way. A hundred times an hour we narrowly shaved an unexploded mine. The sky was pitiless, the wind continuously howled, huge waves broke on the deck, crashing like guns. For three days and nights the Captain hardly left the bridge. I used to hear him come down for a minute to his saloon to try and thaw his frozen fingers. I ached for him to have a stiff glass of grog, as a mere human necessity, but prohibition

rules the American Navy, and the poor man had to content himself with what vitamins he could extract from candy. He would fumble with a box of sweets, swallow a lump of Turkish delight in the vain attempt to get a fillip, and then, cold and wretched, stagger back to the blinding snowstorm, the raging sea, the interminable look-out for the death-traps that crowded the waters. The one calm night I can recall saw the handing over of the German men-of-war to the British Navy off the Dogger Bank. It was all done very quietly, the slim destroyers, the proud battleships, passed without fuss or tremor from the losing to the winning side. A few minutes later they had all steamed out of sight. We were alone under the Stars and Stripes.

And now, years after, I was taking the same route in perfect comfort and security. In 1919 we were carrying food to a war-ridden population. In 1930 that same population ships tons and tons of eggs and bacon, butter and lard and potatoes, to our shores.

The sense of time evaporates almost at the moment it emphasizes the lapse of years. . . .

The *Warsawa* arrived at the entrance to the Kiel Canal on Sunday, and we all strolled on the shore to buy cigars, scent, postcards, and chocolates from the affable Germans who eagerly displayed their wares. From the green meadows sloping to the water-side came the shouts of young people making holiday. We exchanged greetings in English; two of our crowd—schoolboys going to Danzig for their holidays—broke into German. Fraternity steeped the air.

But, side by side with this embracement of diverse

concomitants, running parallel with it, was the picture in my mind of eleven years ago when we had passed silently down the canal, through a brooding people whose hostility seemed to steel the air. White, sullen faces fronted us; men, women, and children ranged themselves along the banks. They were hungry, and rumour had reached them that we carried food. But not for them—it was only passing through their waters to another land. They cursed us quietly and dreadfully as we glided by, and spat with a shuddering solemnity. The old pilot who took us up the canal wept, I remember, when he was given pork for supper. He had not even tasted ham for two long years. A prominent official of the Kiel Canal came secretly to the ship and asked to be allowed to buy a piece of soap. He had doffed his uniform, and the proud swagger of his high position had fallen from him. Starvation stalked by his side.

But it was not until we had reached Kiel itself that the consciousness of what defeat meant to this people fully broke on me. For where the Imperial Navy used to ride in proud security was a vast emptiness, flanked by a French destroyer, whose saucy tricolour streamed in the breeze.

Carthago delenda est . . . ? It seemed so eleven years ago, but now, to-day, life has renewed itself, and Kiel bustles with commercial activity, big ships and little ships crowd the quays, flags of all nations enjoy temporary hospitality.

I wonder sometimes, when I listen to the conversation as to Moscow's new frightfulness, whether in

another ten years the same thing may not happen once again, and that in place of suspicious hostility toward the U.S.S.R. I may find the same friendly interest toward Russia that has revived again between young Germany and ourselves. . . .

We travelled through from Danzig—or Gdansk, as the beautiful old city is more properly called—to Warsaw, in a particularly comfortable carriage with delicious meals. These two things impinge on my memory in virtue of what came after. The sharp declension from the Polish to the Soviet railway service impresses itself on the pampered traveller, unused to wooden seats and rationless journeys. But smooth travelling is the rule in Poland. Even in the smallest village out in the wilds you will find a clean inn and kindly entertainment.

We discovered Warsaw preparing for the celebration of the victory against the Bolsheviks which in 1920 turned the tide of invasion and saved the city. The whole city was *en fête*; every shop was decorated, flags streamed from the poorest as from the finest house. The big wireless station broadcast the events of the day from early the next morning, the loud speakers booming across the Pilsudski Place, which was filled with massed troops. The huge square, flanked by high buildings, is instinct with tradition, linked close with the national history. From the balcony of the Europieski Hotel we looked straight over the dense crowd of spectators, the serried ranks of soldiery, to the tomb of the Unknown Warrior, guarded by the leaping flames of its undying lamps.

On that same square, only ten years before, had stood the Russian church, one of the most beautiful, proud, and impregnable buildings I have ever seen. The story of its erection and its demolition is a landmark in the life of Poland. The square of old was known as the Stacki Place; the scene of more than one futile attempt to throw off the foreign yoke, its stones were stained with patriot blood held in perpetual remembrance. The Tsarist Government decided it was time to end the legend of sacrifice, and resolved to build there, in the very heart of Warsaw, a Greek Orthodox church, stamped with the symbol of Russian dominance.

The news spread, and in despair at the thought that this place, sacred to their martyrs, should be chosen for the temple of a conquering faith the city's youth drew lots as to who should lay down his life. For on the spot where a suicide has taken place no church of God can be erected. The ground is sacrosanct.

The sacrifice, it was felt, would stop even the Tsarist hand, and a boy of eighteen stabbed himself to the heart on the spot where his forefathers had already fallen. But the secret police were equal to the occasion. They insisted that it was not a case of suicide, but of murder, and the foundation-stones were laid.

Slowly the church rose to completion, and frowned down upon the city in all the strength of a conqueror's pride. A symbol of the domination of the enemy, its unbreakable back lay heavy on the people's spirit.

And then, as by a miracle, the Tsar's power col-

lapsed, Poland won her independence, and the church disappeared.

And to-day Pilsudski Place remains open to the winds of heaven, the very centre of national life.

From early dawning of the anniversary we watched the people flock in from the surrounding country, peasants in gorgeous petticoats of orange, striped in green and purple; bands of mountaineers in their white trousers, sheepskin coats, and silver belts; miners from Silesia, with their womenfolk in gaily coloured headdresses and beribboned plaits; students from Lwow, Vilno, Cracow, and Warsaw Universities lined up with workmen, artists, and professors, in the curiously hushed attention that still pervades an assemblage in the streets. It is one of the legacies of the old Russian rule under which vocal demonstrations in public were prohibited on penalty of imprisonment. Much else has passed away, but this inhibition yet endures. The silence of the Poles under emotional stress is awe-inspiring.

It was a day of memorable impressions, but at the same time it completely held up our arrangements. The Soviet Embassy, like the Polish Government offices, the local banks, and shops, was shut. The next day, also a public holiday, was duly observed by the Soviet either through politeness or fatigue, and not until Saturday morning was the ordinary business routine resumed.

We went up the long flight of shallow steps to the Bolshevik stronghold feeling excited and adventurous. We rang the bell, but nobody answered, and presently

the door, in an eerie, unexpected manner, swung open of itself, admitted us, and then clanged to behind. Here was another chapter of the fairy-tale that had begun in Moorgate Street!

A short, square-shouldered Bolshevik—he might have been a younger brother of the Gleam—received us in stony silence. He remained equally impervious to English, French, or broken Polish, and finally we fell back on signs and motions and were taken to a waiting-room crowded with people. There was a dreadful familiarity in the surroundings. The same posters, grown more sinister with distance from home, scowled at us from the walls, and time, in Warsaw as in the London office, no longer existed.

I felt, however, that this was a moment for demonstration, and firmly knocked at the door of an adjoining room, which, suddenly opening, invited us to enter. Was there, we asked in trembling eagerness, a telegram for us from Moscow? The *attaché* bowed, but looked quite blank. He also was a limited linguist, and only spoke his mother-tongue. It seemed as though we had arrived at a deadlock, but Bunny saved the situation. She has a marvellous genius for pantomime, and on one occasion discovered the whereabouts of the Salvation Army in Prague by her brilliant imitation of a brass band and a hymn-book! The present *impasse* gave her no anxiety. Waving her left hand in slow motion, indicative of distance, she ejaculated "London," pointing to herself and me. The intelligent Moscovite immediately registered. The right hand then indicated our present position in Warsaw, followed by the loca-

tion of Moscow ahead, accompanied by the word "*Télégraphique!*" This had to be repeated several times, but finally the *attaché* got it, and dispatched a minion to search for the message. But alas! he returned empty-handed. There was no *télégraphique*, and our pantomimic invention was at an end. We felt, however, that from the wreck of our hopes we must salvage the official's name. We each produced a visiting-card, and, pointing to ourselves, recited our patronymics and waited for his. It took him quite a minute before he realized what we wanted. Then with a shout of laughter he joined the game, alternately pointing and bowing and repeating his name.

Grabenchikov, he was called, which in English, I believe, signifies a small comb. But to us he became 'Grabby,' because in his excitement he almost snatched.

Grabby was enormously tall, very genial, and gave us a Russian cigarette. This, however, did not advance us on our journey, and we began to feel like Tchekhov's three sisters, who spent their lives trying to get to Moscow and never even started.

Having made sure he had registered our names, we left him still murmuring "*télégraphique*," and went off to the British Embassy for advice. England is lucky in being represented at Warsaw by a very charming and most efficient *personnel*, to whom to-day, as formerly, I owe considerable gratitude. Mr Egerton Sykes promised to tackle Grabby in his native tongue and ring us up at the hotel.

Late that night we had the message. No telegram

had come from Moscow, no advice from London. We were back once more at the beginning.

But the chink of light again broke through—if we liked to pay Grabby would send another telegram. . . . We paid!

Meantime we renewed acquaintance with Polish friends and tried to find out something of the actual conditions—food, money, accommodation, etc., over the frontier. But though only a day's journey from the border, Warsaw was no better informed than London. There was a general belief that food was very scarce and very dear and that to go unaccompanied by Soviet officials was to court considerable danger. On the other hand, tales of atrocities, replete with ample details, were thick on the air.

The papers were full of the shooting of a woman who, trying to escape, had almost reached the Polish frontier when the Bolshevik Guard spotted her and fired at sight. The poor thing, Polish by birth and Russian by marriage, had vainly tried for permission to go back to her native land, and at last, distraught with waiting, sick with hope deferred, had risked everything on a hazard, and, within sight of winning, lost.

Then there was the case of the English boy who a few months earlier had travelled through to Archangel, suffering cruel indignities and incredible hardships *en route*. We had already heard the story in London, where, as in Warsaw, no details were forthcoming as to the official reasons for this strange behaviour.

Here also the atmosphere was dark with warning.

I confess that I began to feel a little apprehensive;

after all, Poland had known and suffered Russian rule for centuries. But at the same time the Bolsheviks under this concerted attack acquired a new and more significant attraction. If Moscow should refuse us permission, I began to wonder if it would be impossible to smuggle ourselves in without.

I realized from the serious warnings of my friends this would be a dangerous proceeding, but I decided, if all else failed, to 'inspect' the frontier with a view to discovering the actual possibilities of such an attempt. And so we waited, spending Sunday with a brilliant young geographer who, just released from military service, recreated historic Poland, her principalities, and powers until her triumphs lived again. By Monday our spirits were at zero. We sat about in the big lounge of the Europieski simply aching with rebellion and despair, until late in the afternoon the hall porter—master of a hundred tongues and safe repository of international secrets—told us he had a message from the Soviet Embassy.

Moscow had spoken. Our recommendations had been received, and, incredible good fortune, we were to collect our visas the next morning from Grabenchikov.

"This," I said, "is a marvellous moment, and demands celebration. To-morrow we may be starving—let us eat to-day."

We had an epicurean meal of crayfish soup, spring chicken, and an exotic sweet at an absurdly cheap figure, and enjoyed ourselves immensely. Its memory spread far into the future.

It was our last 'banquet' for many days!

Chapter II

WE CROSS THE RUBICON

WE left Warsaw by the night mail for the north the next evening. But there was much to do before we finally entrained. Now that we had really reached the threshold of our venture it became necessary swiftly to take stock of the chances and changes we might encounter in the U.S.S.R. Money was the chief consideration. An experienced traveller told us that the bare cost of living would total to £3 10s. a day each, without railway fares! The figure was incredible and alarming—our finances could not stand up against such a strain. We did what we could, however, and liquefied our resources into American dollars and English pounds, trusting to luck for the rest.

The U.S.A. currency, it was said, would be recognized in places where the Bank of England had not yet been heard of. This, however, we found was legend. You can change English money as easily as American in any bank all over Russia, and the exchange is uniform. We received 8 roubles 50 kopeks to the pound, though the rate quoted outside Russia at that time was 30 roubles!

The next item was food—we remembered the German's wail at Moorgate Street as to starving trains—and decided that we would go provided as far as

possible. We took biscuits, rolls, butter, cheese, tins of soup, sardines, chocolate, two pounds of Polish ham, tea, sugar, and lemons—for all of which we lived to be truly thankful. Medicaments we had in plenty, including quinine, aspirin, boracic lint, and a large supply of insecticides. We had need of every one of these.

Grabby at our final call received us very kindly, and, with the help of our young Polish friend who spoke Russian, we procured our visas at a cost of thirty shillings each in record time. We were also presented with a card of standard instructions as to conduct, printed in French, of which the most important relates to the embargo on imported roubles. The penalty for smuggling currency over the border is immediate expulsion from the country, with the possibility of arrest. It is, in any case, a risky game and not worth the candle, for though you may buy paper roubles in any European capital at a price which would halve or quarter your expenses in the U.S.S.R., there is always the possibility that the particular issue may have been called in, which would leave you very definitely in the air—if not in gaol.

Our luggage we reduced to two small suitcases easily carried by hand. Heavy baggage is an impossible *impedimenta*, and becomes, in actual fact, a burden to the flesh. Porters, as we know them in Europe, do not exist in Russia, and railway officials who consent to help with baggage are very few and far between.

The economic conditions of the U.S.S.R. suggested an extreme simplicity of wardrobe. We each took a

costume, a top-coat, mackintosh, blouses, and a couple of light frocks. It was more than sufficient. Thus armed we started on our last lap to the frontier.

The Polish-Russian boundary, extending from north to south for six hundred miles, passes to the north-east through a territory inhabited on both sides of the line by Ruthenians who speak the same language with idiomatic differences of locality. They both till the same spare soil for a Spartan living and practise the same traditional arts and crafts. Under Poland they are known as White Ruthenians; across the border they become White Russians. The religion of the peoples is impartially Catholic or Greek Orthodox under both Governments.

A country of low-lying marshes and sandy wastes, it blooms and blossoms in the spring to infinite loveliness. Summer comes late, and the tender green of the trees lingers through August into early autumn till, like a wolf from the north, winter descends.

Nowhere can you find the similarities and contrasts of Russian and Polish civilization so clearly defined as at these outposts of Western and Eastern Europe. On the one side you see the traditional peasantry settled on their plots of land inherited and transmitted through generations. On the other the early beginnings of a *régime* which ultimately must sweep the individual holder into oblivion—the first strivings of a campaign mightier than anything the earth has ever seen.

I had a unique opportunity for making these comparisons. The Polish Government, on their part, gave me all possible assistance. We were accompanied to

White Ruthenia by an *attaché* from the Foreign Office who, with a lieutenant of the frontier guards, toured us for miles and miles around the country.

We reached the frontier town of Stolpce at 4 A.M. The dawn had already broken, and the pale gold streaks of sunshine showed the white roofs of the little houses nestling close to the station, unexpectedly large and well constructed, with a pleasant buffet and steaming-hot tea; revealed the Bolshevik trucks in a siding; lit up the cobbled square, the tiny shops, the women, bare-footed and beshawled, already at that early hour sweeping the streets. A tidy, thriving, lovely little town with a comfortable inn—the Hotel Europa, with accommodation for three guests, where we slept for four long blissful hours—and a jolly little *café* with excellent rye coffee, good butter, and white bread. We remembered that luscious white bread many, many times in the next weeks!

We spent that day travelling along the frontier following the road Napoleon's army took in his advance on Moscow. It was a break-neck journey. The car, incredibly resilient, floundered in a bog, dashed over stones, flew like a bird across a ditch, crashed through hedges and fields. The Polish drivers are miraculous or diabolical, according to the point of view. They put their cars at an obstacle as they would put a horse at a fence, and with the luck of the dare-devil usually get through.

Our companions remained unmoved by the torrential motion, and we did our best to follow suit, clinging for dear life to the swaying Dodge, taking a precipitous

descent with set teeth, while sudden swirls of dust filled our nostrils and got into our eyes. The long green track stretched far into the distance, punctuated by villages, small churches, and wayside Calvaries, which mark the graves of soldiers who fell in the Great War. The countryside, fought over again and yet again, is healed of its wounds. The brilliant sward of the marshland lies like a magic carpet over the gaping sores. Only those slim and silent crosses by the roadside point to the spot where blood once flowed, mournful fingers reaching up toward a gentian-blue summer sky.

The villages on the Polish side are clean, picturesque, and prosperous; the homesteads, with their long, sloping roofs built to resist snow, have a big living-room with two or three sleeping-rooms and comfortable bedding. Chickens and ducks wander quite happily in and out of the houses, which in winter-time also shelter the family pig, goat, or cow. These have their summer quarters apart, but once the frost has set in it is not safe to leave the livestock unprotected in the sty or the stable. The wolves prowling for food come right up to the cottage door, wild at the smell of living flesh behind it; in the absence of the men and their guns the stout beechwood is the only protection!

The walls of the rooms, polished by age, are decorated with pictures of the saints and, among the Catholics, an occasional statue of Our Lady. The women work in the fields side by side with their men; only by the tensest industry do they wrest a living from stepmother earth. In the evenings the men

WE CROSS THE RUBICON

carve, the women weave and embroider. Polish and Ruthenian are both taught in the schools, but the peasants are slow in taking up the official language. Their songs, their legends, their very roots, are set in their own tongue, and, like their agricultural methods, go back to far-off generations—the horse-drawn plough still plods its way over the fields. A wistful peace, a hard-earned repose, lay on the countryside—winter on that glorious day of sunshine seemed remote and far away.

In our stride we took the town of Nieuswicz, a pendant in my memory to the Soviet towns across the border. Here the market-square was crowded with peasants who had brought their produce from miles around in the low, springless wooden carts in use all over Poland and Russia. Pigs grunted, cows lowed, chickens and ducks alive and clucking passed from seller to buyer, who meticulously felt and prodded their fleshy parts, pricing them according to plumpness. Sacks of potatoes, loaves of bread, cheese, butter, beetroot, new-laid eggs heaped on stalls or on the ground, were under the charge of old women and young girls in brightly coloured shawls, full skirts, and heavy, high-laced boots.

We had food at a local inn, which somehow had the air of a wild-west film about it. A jazz band with a rickety piano played in one corner; swarthy complexioned Ruthenians in sheepskin jackets and hats and enormous leggings discussed their business over flagons of beer in another. One or two soldiers from the frontier-guard forgathered at a table, and well-to-

do farmers bought and sold their crops and herds, while huge sheep-dogs trotted in and out, suspiciously inspecting us.

The lieutenant while we ate our meal told us stories of the frontier that perceptibly chilled our enthusiasm. He did not speak English or French, and we could not understand German and but little Polish, but the *attaché*, our guide, philosopher, and friend to the last inch of his native territory, translated.

The north-east frontier, closely guarded on both sides, tingles along its whole length with the repercussion of Bolshevik activity. Rumours run over the line like hares, and not a day passes without the news of an attempted escape. The lieutenant told us quite frankly and very charmingly that he thought we were not taking our adventure with sufficient seriousness. Once past the black-and-white post that limits Polish and begins Soviet territory we should be engulfed in a land impervious to the ordinary channels of communication open to foreigners. There are no British Consuls in the U.S.S.R. outside Moscow and Leningrad, while the number of people who understand English or French are very few, so that the most innocent action may be mistaken as attempted espionage.

I confess he tempered our ardour; but even then I did not realize how utterly hopeless it would be to try to cross the line without a passport. This did not drive home until we travelled back through Stolpce and out to the frontier proper protected by miles and miles of barbed wire. We looked across vast spaces of sandy soil, covered in green weeds. There was no

sign of a dwelling-place; the faint smoke of a friendly chimney could not be seen. The solitary figures in the distance outlined sharply against their background had an air of isolation almost sinister.

A square, compact-looking building—a Bolshevik blockhouse we were told—overawed the landscape. Night and day behind its fortified walls sharpshooters keep a stern look-out for fugitives and trespassers. And it was in circumstances such as these that I had thought it possible we could creep through unnoticed! It is astonishing how foolish at times a reasonably intelligent woman can be.

The Polish blockhouse, at the end of a mud-tract with deep water-holes, commands a clear view of the country. Built to resist and open fire, it has also a pleasing garden and a genial rest-room. Month in, month out, winter and summer, the guards keep watch and ward. But though the Soviet is separated only by the long trail of barbed wire, what happens on the other side is steeped in secrecy. Poland knows little more than England of the actual facts of Russia's everyday existence—an impenetrable bar of silence fences off authentic information.

It was through that barrier, across that waste country into the very heart of Communism, that we proposed to go. The wind sweeping over the marshes suddenly blew cold.

"We must get back," said the lieutenant. "We've only just time for the train."

I looked at Bunny. Her face bore its usual smile, but her mouth had a slight droop. At close quarters

MY RUSSIAN VENTURE

the venture lost something of its glitter for both of us; but an attraction just as keen lies in anticipatory fear as in delight. We dashed to the inn, collected our suit-cases, and arrived at the station to find the booking-office agabble with tourists *en route* for Moscow—Germans and Americans, a sprinkling of Russians and a Finnish delegate, flaxen, fat, and feminine, who had lost her travelling-coupons, was unable to explain her predicament, and was due at a women's congress at Leningrad the next day. She did not react to pantomime, but understood a little German, and the lieutenant fixed things up for her as far as the frontier, when, he explained, she must inquire again. But she was one of those soft, helpless feather-beds of women who appeal to everybody and believe no one, and accordingly she approached the *attaché* all over again! An American who had joined in the *mêlée* told us he was going through to Moscow, that he spoke Russian, and would see us safely through the Soviet customs at Negoreloje—for which we were duly thankful.

And then the whistle sounded and we took our seats in the Bolshie train, a touch regretfully. We must, I think, have looked a little woebegone, for suddenly the lieutenant and the count insisted that they would come too, so far at least as the black-and-white pole that symbolizes Bolshevism. They also presented us with a bottle of vodka, which might be scarce and would certainly be very dear where we were going, but would prove invaluable in times of physical stress.

Immensely cheered up, we stood beside them in the corridor, watching the last few miles of Polish territory

slip by. And then, all too soon, the train came to a dead stop; a few yards to the right, level with the front wheels of the engine, stood the post. The time for separation had arrived. We clasped hands, thanked our friends wholeheartedly—and then the train moved on—we had entered Soviet Russia.

I took a last long look at Poland, remembering its comfort and security, with a sinking heart. I strained to catch a fading glimpse of the figures by the post—our friends, with some half a dozen other passengers who had got out on to the line, waved us *adieu*. They were, I felt, the last link between safety and a rather terrifying unknown. I was conscious of a new and curious loneliness, and little shivers of apprehension ran up my spine. . . .

The Polish guard had gone off with the others. His place was taken by a Russian conductor who, after the military precision of his predecessor, looked untidy, almost unkempt. We showed him our tickets—we had booked through to Minsk, White Russia's capital—and at his request produced our passports, which he promptly took and did not return. A small rotund person with a bald head and slightly Mongolian eyes, he buttoned up our precious passports in a leather dispatch-case and took them away, quite indifferent to our protestations.

"We shall never get through," I said gloomily; "to be without a passport in Russia is worse than having no name." Bunny, however, had located the friendly American in an adjoining carriage, and went to make inquiries.

MY RUSSIAN VENTURE

"It's all right," she said, returning from the consultation. "He says they always do it. We shall get them back with luck at Negoreloje."

I realized then what I learned more completely later on: protest, fuss, impatience, justifiable annoyance, or irresponsible outbreaks of anger beat like scraps of paper against Soviet officialdom. You may as well save your temper and your trouble and deliver yourself into their bureaucratic hands.

The countryside was still familiar; the White Ruthenian landscape remained unchanged. Gradually, however, the small plots and sandy wastes gave place to long stretches of cultivated land, huge potato farms, acres and acres of rye, oats, and beetroot, orchards of apples and small plums. I noticed that the people, like their brothers over the border, were dark, undersized, and wiry, with occasionally a definite gipsy type, swarthy and large-limbed. Such peasants as we saw were poorly clad, their coats in rags, their breeches worn and patched. All of them walked barefoot, even near the towns where it is the custom of the country to put on the footgear you have carried in your hands.

But the woman delegate, once more growing restless, distracted my attention from the landscape. She hailed the conductor from an adjoining carriage and pelted him with questions and two small Finnish coins. He remained impassive, however, and repudiated the baksheesh until she grew moist with apprehension and called to him, to us, and to the world generally. But there were no chivalrous Poles to hearken, and the American could not comprehend her, so she finally

WE CROSS THE RUBICON

sought refuge in the consumption of an enormous smoked salmon with thick slices of brown bread and butter. The conductor glared at the fish, and for a moment I thought the salmon would follow our passports—Uncle Tom Cobleigh and all! But he desisted, and, with an oracular announcement of which we understood nothing, removed our suit-cases from the rack and grasped one in each hand. Remembering the vodka and the ham, I protested. But it was merely his method of signifying that the journey was ended. The train drew up at Negoreloje, the first town over the north-west Russian frontier.

The station, with its outlying sheds and offices built entirely of wood, has something of the air of a log-house up-country. It is clean and orderly, and the customs officials and staff generally are neatly dressed in shirt blouses of white or blue linen, cloth trousers, and decent boots. Farther into the interior you leave boots and unpatched trousers far behind; sartorial conditions grow steadily worse.

We climbed on to the high platform, and like the rest lined up with our bags at the customs counter. We were a mixed lot: German, Dutch, Scandinavian, American, and the Finnish delegate, but one official or another was able to cope with every language. Our particular inquisitor, tall, slim-waisted, with deep blue eyes and a black beard, spoke good English and was intensely businesslike and most polite. He searched our luggage thoroughly, but not rudely, though, on the look-out for roubles, he went through every nook and cranny. Currency is the only contraband. This,

MY RUSSIAN VENTURE

however, none of us knew, and we all kept an anxious eye on our belongings. A small *wrow* with a large husband put a protecting hand on a huge portmanteau, gaping with tinned herrings, anchovies, corned beef, and other *delicatessen*. An awful fear of dispossession invaded her, her eyes seemed bursting from their sockets. How, she seemed to ask the universe, shall I feed *Mynheer* if these, my goods, are taken from me? But the supplies were not confiscated. Food is welcome—you may take in all you want for your own consumption, with drink and tobacco as well.

It was a wearying process; the examination seemed to go on for hours and hours, but against the imperturbable unconcern of the Russian outcry beats itself in vain. After your luggage is examined you are called on to declare the amount of your money, your articles of jewellery, watch, etc., together with any other objects of artistic or historic value. These are all noted down and a copy of the list carefully made out and handed to you, so that when you leave the country your possessions can be checked up with the entries. Any unrecorded article is liable to confiscation. A careful watch is kept for ancient manuscripts or prints, gold and silver work, curios, pictures, and ikons, none of which may be taken from the U.S.S.R. without a special permit.

The investigations dragged on, and, tightly wedged among the crowd, we simply had to stand and hope. An Englishman, authoritative and middle-aged, thumped the counter heavily, but his demonstration left the official cold. There was trouble over some

Victorian ballads—*We met, 'twas in a Crowd, She wore a Wreath of Roses*, and other period relics which he was taking with him to Shanghai—presumably to sing! The Bolshie, spotting the date of publication on the imprint—far off in the sixties—insisted that they were antiques and as such must be specially registered. The owner fiercely resisted the idea. He was only passing through the country, and further delay would make him lose his connexion for the East.

He need not have worried. The train did not arrive till hours after scheduled time. Soviet trains are always late, and nobody knows what happens to them. The station commissars spend their days upon the telephone trying to discover where a train has got to. But they never find out, and when at last the prodigal arrives it is as though a miracle had happened, and everybody beams.

The permanent-way on the main lines is excellent, many of the locomotives larger and more powerful than our own, but traffic time-keeping has completely broken down, except, as we are told, between Moscow and Leningrad—the tourist route—where the schedule is strictly adhered to.

Meanwhile the Englishman fretted and fumed as though he were at Tooting, Gravesend, or any other station on a London suburban line where an authoritative manner inspires respect and induces speed. But the Bolshies listened not at all, and the whole crowd waited, straining at the leash for the word go.

The poor man received the last straw when, having resigned himself to the loss of the antiques and re-strapped all his luggage, the official with a charming

smile announced that he had changed his mind—the ballads need not be registered!

The long afternoon was nearing a close, and we began to feel a little anxious as to when the train would start for Minsk. It was already due according to our watches, but a glance at the station clock showed how completely our reckoning was out. Russia takes no stock of Central European time. She has her own, and remains two hours ahead of Berlin, Warsaw, or Vienna. Interrogation as to how or when the Minsk express would arrive elicited nothing, until we encountered the American on his way to the *bureau de change*. He was a blessing, that man. He helped us to change our money, and explained the vital necessity of keeping the receipts. I am always careless with papers, and had calmly thrown away the docket. I'd got the money, it didn't seem necessary to keep a tally. But with a real distressed cry he pounced upon the paper, and for the first time we learnt how essential it is to keep count of the cash you change from pounds or dollars into roubles. The receipts have to square with the amount you have declared on arrival, so that when you quit your balance can be totted up and the roubles you have left—if any!—rechanged, at the same rate, to the original currency. The reason for this precaution is to prevent a foreigner taking more money out of the country than he brings in, thus preventing any possible commercial transactions through private and illegal trading.¹

¹ A law has since been passed which provides that where a visitor has spent less than eight roubles fifty a day money to that amount is deducted from his currency. This, however, does not apply to those who have booked an inclusive tour with the State Agency.

WE CROSS THE RUBICON

Our friend further informed us of the mystery of 'hard' and 'soft' seats. There is no distinction of class on the Soviet railway system—caste is abolished! But on the main-line expresses there is a choice between a padded—*i.e.*, a first-class—compartment as we know it and one fitted only with wooden seats. And the price squares with the accommodation!

Now our tickets, it seemed, were only available by slow train, and to change them for the express would have meant an expenditure of twelve roubles each, which, at the ruinous rate of exchange, panned out at three pounds for the two. We decided to stay our hand and wait—waiting is a necessary condition of Russian travel—and meanwhile with a sudden gleam of forethought I asked the American to write for us in Russian a request to all and sundry to direct us to a lodging for the night and treat us generally with all courtesy and kindness.

This request in a strange country quite ignorant of the language was the only plank between us and utter homelessness!

We had just secured the invaluable document when the Moscow express, complete with soft seats, appeared on a siding. The quietness of the platform was rent, the customs suddenly deserted. A crowd of men, women, and children streamed out on the lines dragging their luggage behind them. My last glimpse was of the Finnish delegate shaking a coupon in the face of the conductor, finally worn down by her spineless persistence.

The train left; we took stock of our surroundings.

MY RUSSIAN VENTURE

The entire place was suddenly strangely empty—of all that throng of passengers not one remained. Moscow, not Minsk, was their destination, and we felt terribly left over. We trailed back to the customs, which by contrast seemed almost like home, to find it in possession of a band of sweepers. We crept to a seat in the corner, out of the range of dust and dirt, and wondered what was going to happen next. It was a desolate situation, late at night—by Russian time—not knowing what to do or how to do it, and without any reassurance that our train would ever come. We saw ourselves immured in the customs office for weeks.

But the doubt in itself was exciting, and, suddenly feeling hungry, we opened our food *cache* and devoured Polish ham, bread and butter, and chocolate. We should have been comparatively cheered up had it not been for the flies of incredible size and terrific biting-power that surrounded us. The Russian fly is irresponsible to all attack. If you hit at him he digs deep into your flesh without budging. If you flick an indignant hand or handkerchief before he lands he merely turns aside and gets you where you aren't looking. They fairly ate our legs, until in desperation we sat upon our feet, taking it in turns to wave our arms in a desperate hope of keeping them off. The sweepers paused in their deliberations and grinned in sympathy. Soviet flesh does not attract these horrors. It is only the foreigner they wish to devour.

It was, I think, the dreadful persistence of the flies that stung me into remembrance.

"Bunny," I said suddenly, "where are our passports? That wretched man never brought them back."

The question was: How should we recover them? All the customs officers, with their linguistic skill, had disappeared. Only the sweepers remained, and, by luck, a little man in the *bureau de change*. The reiteration of the word passport, accompanied by prolific pantomime, finally permeated his intelligence. He nodded, disappeared, came back, and handed Bunny not her own but mine! Only with infinite difficulty did we get the other. It seems remarkable that while the Soviet Government make it incredibly difficult to enter their country, once there it should be a matter of indifference whose passport goes to whom!

It was past midnight when the ten-thirty train to Minsk sauntered in, and Negoreloje woke again to life. From all parts of the station, hidden reaches which we had not permeated, a dense throng emerged—workers and peasants of every age and size stumbled through the darkness over the rails—there is only an arrival, never, it seems, a departure platform—to the huge train, clambering up the steep steps into the dimly lighted carriages.

We battled with the rest, dragging our suit-cases, grown strangely heavy since the morning. The carriages are wider and longer than in England, and above the hard-backed wooden seats are fixed two layers of wooden shelves for sleeping purposes, on to which the more agile scramble and repose themselves.

It was the most fantastic scene imaginable. The

place was packed. Peasant women, barefooted, brown-skinned, their soft and melancholy faces hooded with a shawl, crouched on the floor, surrounded by bundles of vegetables, sacks of potatoes, baskets of tomatoes, apples, household linen, feather-beds, and odd bits of clothes. Mothers settled their children on the hard benches. Incredibly aged men and sturdy youths with enormous packs upon their shoulders climbed above us to the shelves, relapsing in a moment into a deep-breathed slumber. Next to me a kindly old grandmother, with an enormous bundle tied in a faded quilt, said her prayers and composed herself to sleep. On the seat opposite a girl with the eyes of a Madonna suckled her baby. A young woman, incredibly cramped for space, curled herself round a tired child in one of those breathlessly lovely plastic poses that the Russian, as by instinct, so easily assumes. The men did not push in among the women. Those who could not find room upon the shelves above passed through into the next compartment, where at first the sound of their voices joined with the rhythm of the wheels. Gradually, however, they ceased talking, until at last nobody spoke. The train rattled along through an uncanny silence, the solitary candle, set in the wall behind a sheet of mica, casting deep shadows on the quiet faces.

When we came to a stopping-place an occasional passenger got out or came in. But it was only a ripple in the quiet which as the night went on we broke by fevered demands for direction. We had no idea how long the journey would take or at what hour we should

WE CROSS THE RUBICON

arrive, and we dare not allow ourselves to sleep for fear we should be carried past our destination. As we approached a station we sat up and like distressed cats mewed out the word "Minsk." The people were very kind to us. They smiled and shook their heads, and made soft patting motions with their hands as though to tell us not to worry. After four interruptions the Madonna took matters in charge and explained by gesture that she was also bound for the city and would tell us when we came there.

And after that we too grew drowsy. It was as though time had ceased and we had been for ever drifting through the darkness. . . .

We all came to the surface of life again some three hours later, when the lights of Minsk shone through the windows. We need not have worried—it was a terminus, and the whole seething mass of bundles, young peasants and aged men and women, unloaded. The station was packed with people apparently waiting for the next day's trains. The platforms, corridors, waiting- and refreshment-rooms, were filled with peasants and workmen, their wives and families, all sleeping where they sat or lay, in the most complete immobility.

Bunny and I pinched ourselves to see if we were really awake. It was like being with Alice in Wonderland—everything was back to front. The passengers were all asleep, and the staff were all awake, newspaper kiosks, ticket-offices, and the rest flaring with light and officials, but quite empty of the outside world. Later we found out the explanation of the fairy-tale. The

MY RUSSIAN VENTURE

Russians sleep at any opportunity, and as they never know when a train will start they come prepared for quite a long stay at the various railway depots. Hour after hour the people wait and sleep, and sleep and wait.

We would dearly have loved to have lain down beside them. We had had no real rest for over four-and-twenty hours and were dog-tired. But in the reassurance of the American's SOS to all good people we hoped to take our sleep in as comfortable a bed as was obtainable.

Yet between that hope and an ultimate resting-place there lay many adventures.

Chapter III

MINSK—THE CITY OF SPRINGING HOPE AND DEAD HEARTS

WE spent a distracted interval upon Minsk station seeking to establish some means of communication between us and the rest of the world.

We agreed to present the request for lodgings in turns, and Bunny 'pushed off' first, while I waited with the luggage. It is, however, one of the difficulties of Russian travelling that you have no criteria by which to select an educated or indeed a literate person. Distinctions of dress have gone by the board. The majority of women are hatless, the men all wear caps shapelessly squashy, and nine out of ten have at least a three days' beard, so it is very hard to pick and choose. The obvious idea was to find a commissar of police, but here again we found legend in direct contradiction to fact, and instead of the place bristling with OGPU no guardian of the peace could be discovered. I watched Bunny approach an intelligent-looking man of about forty-five, a boy of twenty, and a woman in the thirties. And with all of them she drew blank. Was it possible that these subjects of the Soviet, these city dwellers, meticulously standardized, could not read?

This, however, was not the general explanation. The reason for this ignorance was far more subtle.

MY RUSSIAN VENTURE

The message was written in Russian, but the people of Minsk, as all over the Republic of White Russia, speak their native Ruthenian, which under the U.S.S.R. has become a recognized language. Ruthenian, which has its roots in the original Slav language that eventually split up into its present component parts, largely resembles Polish, with a flavour of Russian, and is written and printed in the Latin characters, and, as we found, only a small percentage are able to read anything else, though simple words in everyday use are largely identical in every Slav country.

I learned all this later, when I also realized the cleverness of the Kremlin policy that, contrary to Tsarist procedure which forced unwilling millions to speak Russian, has restored to every republic in the Union the right to use their native tongue in the schools and public offices.

Meantime the paper passed from hand to hand but nothing happened, till in despair I walked into the ticket-office—where I was not supposed to be—and laid it, well worn by this time and more than dirty, before a competent-looking woman who sat like a Roman general before a huge ticket-machine. She read, smiled, comprehended, and forthwith wrote down a couple of addresses. I returned in triumph to Bunny, who was looking by this time like an orphan of the storm, and together we took up our suit-cases—how we wished we had only brought a knapsack!—and tottered out into the night.

We imagined then that in a little time we should

find ourselves at a comfortable hotel. Governments may change, thrones crumble, but hot baths and soft beds surely remain. The only difficulty was transport. There were no taxis—there are none outside Moscow and Leningrad—and Minsk possesses but one official car. Motor-buses in this city of 200,000 do not exist, and the trams had stopped for the night. But though the State has swallowed up the control of transport, by one of those loopholes integral to things Russian, the ancient and dishonourable order of droshkys still survives. A long line of these dilapidated and dejected-looking vehicles, with the sorriest nags, was drawn up outside the station, in charge of the most ragged and villainous set of scoundrels I have ever seen. Unwashed, smelling foully, they swarmed about us like a cloud of flies, quarrelling as it seemed over our possessions and peering vaguely at the addresses which they could not read. Our chance of ever getting a bed seemed pretty hopeless! Indeed, it took the whole resources of the group to unearth a young man, slightly cleaner than the rest, who triumphantly deciphered the wording, when, holding firmly to our bags, we were pushed into a shatterydan affair, tied up with rope and string, full of dust, and unpleasantly musty.

The car-ride over the Polish marshes was as nothing to what followed. Convulsively clinging to the seat, we were bumped through dark streets full of deep ruts that seemed like half-dug trenches, the back of the driver stiff as a ramrod rearing up before us. Gradually we found ourselves leaving the centre of

the town, and, skirting the main roads, we turned into the back streets, where only an occasional bleary lamp broke the darkness. Not a soul did we pass, not a sound did we hear, only the clipperty-clop of the horses' hoofs upon the cobbles.

"Where is he taking us?" said Bunny. "I know we shall find ourselves in some dreadful place where we shall be robbed, if not murdered."

"But if we stop him what can we do?" I urged. "He can't understand what we say, and anything is better than being landed in the streets."

But all the same I felt distinctly apprehensive. I have been in some queer spots in my life and have had some unpleasant quarters of an hour, but I have always felt that I could extricate myself if necessary. This was a different matter. The horse stopped abruptly, the driver turned round, gesticulating wildly and shouting something that sounded curiously like 'ham.' Bunny declared he wished to indicate that the road was very hard and caused the horse unnecessarily to 'hammer.' But whatever he may have meant, he started off again and plunged into a dark and narrow road. It was, I confess, rather frightening. But it is so rarely these days that one is legitimately thrilled that I frankly enjoyed the sensation, and recommended Bunny to try and enjoy it also. And so in the darkness—we had got beyond the flickering lamps—passionately embracing the rocking vehicle in an effort to stay in, we remembered all the tales that we had heard in England—how unutterably far away home seemed—with an awful significance.

Suddenly we stopped before a tall, gaunt building of unfriendly aspect, which at best might have been a cheap shelter in the East End, at worst a penal reformatory. Through the open door we saw a lighted stone staircase, steep and narrow, with men, poverty-stricken and in every stage of destitution, flitting about. The spectacle of those ragged figures was unnerving.

Was this our 'hotel'? The driver must have sensed our hesitation, for he seized our luggage and, holding it firmly in one hand, demanded his fare with the other. In Russian currency his price of ten roubles was probably quite moderate, but reckoned in English coinage we had to pay him 25s. for a two-mile drive! Ruffian as he was, we watched him go regretfully—we felt so utterly alone as we surveyed the long, sinister stone stairs.

A big-bearded Bolshevik from behind a desk signed to us to come up. We felt him watching us; the men in rags waiting round were watching us too. We were ringed with curious eyes—and not a sign of a woman anywhere about the place!

We were, I suppose, legitimate objects of curiosity—our costumes though quiet were whole, our shoes neat and polished, and we were wearing gloves. We must have seemed fabulous in our well-fed security.

The place was queer, but anything, we felt, was better than a return to those dark, silent streets. Friendless and with nowhere to go, we realized that on the watching Cerberus depended our chance of a lodging for the night. We showed him our passports,

which he impounded, and demonstrated with hand on cheek our desire to sleep. He nodded, and, taking a key from a huge board with many numbers, motioned to us to pick up our luggage—oh for an English page-boy!—and follow him. He led the way across a landing, up more stairs, and down a long stone corridor, dimly lit. At first I could not see, but, gradually growing accustomed to the obscurity, I noted the lack of paint upon the walls, the crumbling distemper, the general air of neglect. And then with a sudden switching over of the nerves I very nearly screamed. Out of the shadow there emerged a huge white figure of a wolf—fangs and snarling jaw complete—so real, so devastatingly ferocious, that at first I thought it was alive instead of merely stuffed.

Things are like that in Russia. Appearances are grim and gaunt and terrifying at a distance, but under the surface you find unexpected reassurance and assuagement.

We stopped at last at the door of No. 29, which Cerberus opened, switching on the light—the one cheery thing in the whole apartment. The floor, covered with linoleum, was littered with grit and dust that crunched under the feet. There were two single beds in the main room and two in an alcove opening out of it. But only one of the four was made up. Small and narrow, it seemed impossible for two grown women to sleep in such a tiny space, and we tried to make Cerby understand that we required another bed. But either he was slow or we were stupid, for the more we demonstrated our desire for

extra sleeping accommodation, the more he shook his head and smiled! Later we realized what had happened. He thought we feared the other beds might be occupied by strangers and was doing his best to reassure us. At last we gave up trying, and Cerby left us with the dust, two gaunt windows, void of blind or curtain, a large deal table covered with a dirty cloth badly stained, a rickety wardrobe, two chairs, and one toilet-basin chock-full of cigarette-ends, but fitted with running water. But, alas, the water did not run! Only a few tired drops exuded from the tap, and there was no chance of a wash.

We got out our flit, liberally besprinkled the bed, and, literally dropping with sleep, crawled in between the sheets. The linen was clean, so were the army blankets. Indeed, we did not suffer from a thoroughly dirty bed anywhere in Russia.

The morning found us refreshed and smiling. There is a quality in the air of these parts indescribably refreshing; a warm, strong stimulant, soft yet tonic, we found it practically impossible to tire, no matter how long the day, how arduous our undertakings. We took things leisurely that morning, however, and, to save ourselves the trouble of struggling with an hotel menu, made our breakfast of tea with lemon, bread and butter, and the good old ham.

The washing-basin tap was slightly more energetic than on the previous night, but it only ran cold, and all attempts to get hot water from the buxom wench who answered our calls were unavailing.

We stayed in all sorts of places and in varying

kinds of hotels, but, clean or dirty, well-appointed or ill-kept, cheap or dear, the same shortage of hot water was apparent. The whole plumbing system of the U.S.S.R. seems to have gone awry. During the Revolution, with its cessation from ordinary routine, the boiler fires went unattended, so that the pipes froze and when the thaw came incontinently burst. And though odds and ends of patching have been done, the general deterioration of the pipes remains the same. Wherefore hot water is as rare as a miracle, and a bath has all the shadowy mysticism of the Holy Grail, for ever pursued and rarely overtaken.

The house was very quiet and, when we went into the passage, seemed deserted. One or two women were scrubbing the corridors and generally tidying up, and we registered the hope that they would do the same kindness to No. 29.

Our next step was to find the Foreign Office, where, as the American had told us, we had to register. Cerberus had been replaced by a foxy little individual who, when asked for our passports, seemed to read our thoughts, and at the word 'commissar' wrote down instructions. It was an odd experience—in a totally strange place with only our wits and our sense of humour to keep us going! But the very disadvantages were appetizing, and, having studied the situation of our lodgings—we learned after that we were staying at no less a place than the FIRST SOVIET HOTEL—we set off on our quest. It was like the beginning of one of Grimm's tales!

I shall not easily forget my first sight of Minsk by

daylight. Long, mean streets, tumble-down houses, huge squares flanked by high buildings, paintless and scarred with cracks, the place was stamped with desolation, hopelessness, and despair. The streets were fairly crowded, but the men and women seemed to walk without objective. Ragged, dirty, most of them without boots, they drifted in a kind of bemused stream, their faces mournful and impassive, their feet dragging, almost decayed. I suddenly realized that there was hardly one young thing among them. A small child here and there trotted by the side of mother or grandmother, but a girl or boy in the teens or early twenties was not to be seen. Everything was dilapidated, almost falling to pieces. It was a cemetery of a city, where half-dead people crept in and out of graves. And yet the morning was so lovely, with an impossibly brilliant blue sky and a roguish little wind that set the leaves of the plane-trees in the square all of a flutter, and idly billowed the shawls of the old grannies waiting for trams.

Those senseless and incredible trams, on which millions of Russians have to depend for transport to and from their daily work! The electric installation is efficient, the drivers capable, but neither in Minsk, in Charkov, in Kiev, nor in any of the chief provincial cities do they run to time. Apparently they cannot. Like the trains, they are governed by a disorderly time-table. No one in authority has the knowledge to put things right.

Now, among the many things I have learned through Russia is the valuable item that the making of a

time-table is a human marvel comparable only to a special creation by God. It needs a particular type of mind allied with long and practical experience. There are, I have been told, only six men in the whole United Kingdom able to set the railway wheels correctly going, and perhaps another six could be discovered on the Continent. This being so, Russia's unscheduled plight cannot be wondered at. For time-tables rarely spring from the proletariat; they are a product of the better-fed and better-housed sections of society, and of these in the U.S.S.R. but a handful remains. The middle class, with all its faults and qualities, its limitations and enthusiasms, has been wiped out—and with it those exotic creatures who can control trains, omnibuses, and trams. And until she decides either to rear this precious species or to import from abroad Russia's transport system must remain in chaos, to the detriment of food distribution and commerce generally. Whole train-loads of stuff will remain for weeks in remote sidings, lost to the official eye, and communities impatiently remain half fed through this hold-up of supplies. And, tiny gnats in the great scheme of dislocation, for the same reason we hung about the square, waiting and hoping for the belated tram to come our way.

In the centre of the town the street crowds were more dense, but just as depressing. Shops, as we know them, there were none; only dull Government stores, badly arranged, their small windows piled up haphazard with incongruous commodities, bread sprawling against potatoes, household utensils mixed

with green vegetables. The effect of the general indigence, the procession of rags and tags, was devastating. The weary faces and shuffling feet hurt profoundly.

Suddenly, above a tumble-down doorway, flaunting the red and yellow with unbelievable effrontery, we spotted a poster with the magic words 'Billie Dove.' The English lettering flamed out at us from the Russian script. Yes, it was Billie Dove, the idol of the movies, who here in this dying city proclaimed the vigour of Hollywood and all its stars! The posters signified the tie that unites the Soviet and what used to be called the New World. Hollywood is firmly rooted in the U.S.S.R.—the outward and visible sign of an inner and economic understanding. America gives the Soviet extended credit for the steam-tractors and other machines which are part and parcel of the Five Years Plan, under which Stalin aims at industrializing agriculture and establishing a factory system in every city and town, and as a *quid pro quo* American films are freely imported and served up with their luxurious trimmings to millions of city Bolsheviks who lead hard-working, serious, and terribly drab lives. At the moment of which I write, however, this economic explanation had not reached me, and I was able unthinkingly to enjoy this sudden link with Hammersmith Broadway on a Saturday evening, the Angel at Islington, the Marble Arch on a sunny afternoon. I felt an affection for Billie, and wished that I had seen her!

"But," said Bunny firmly, "all this will not get

MY RUSSIAN VENTURE

us to the Foreign Ministry." We gazed anxiously at the slow-moving groups, but never an answering eye met ours.

A tall, elderly, rather distinguished-looking person suddenly caught our attention. He had a native distinction which his dreadful jacket, worn to the bone, and green beyond the faintest memory of black, could not disguise. He was unshaven, and his open shirt was soiled, but his hands were clean and well kept, and neither poverty nor fear could dim his personality.

We produced the inevitable paper, and, with the good fortune that in all extremities seems to befall us, he nodded understanding.

And then the fun began. So long as we did not stop and speak nobody seemed aware of us. We blended in with the rest. But once we began to talk the whole street became actively concerned. We were surrounded in a flash, the centre of gaping mouths, inquisitive eyes, and a flood of conversation. No one was ever rude to us in these contingencies. They merely stared or civilly addressed us, bubbling with glee at our replies in an unknown tongue. We always greeted these manifestations with a little bow and a smile, courtesies which were invariably returned.

Our friend led the way across the road, sections of the crowd following. We passed through interminable streets of dreary houses, from which peered spiritless men and women. The people of the older generation seemed to have been sentenced lingeringly

to die; the younger generation were all missing. Where, I asked myself unhappily, where was the passion, the enthusiasm, the fervour for the Soviet of which I had heard so much? It seemed incredible that a nation should have waded through blood and anguish only to reach a blind dejection. There must be something behind this apathy; the greatest human experiment the world has ever seen must mean more than this.

I was to find the answer later. . . .

Our guide had charming manners, and escorted us with all the attention accorded to women in Europe. In the cities of Russia courtesy between the sexes has gone by the board, and gradually we grew accustomed to seeing young women fight for a seat in the tram, while the young men, quite indifferent, leave them clinging by an eyelash. No offence being meant, none is taken!

But our friend was different, and I formed a theory about him which subsequent experience confirmed. He obviously belonged to the last remnant of the old *intelligentzia*, for which reason he carefully cultivated an even greater squalor of appearance than the normal. He had to do this in self-protection. For there is in Soviet Russia an implacable antagonism toward those people who before the Revolution were able through favourable circumstances to receive an education which the ordinary peasant or workman could not afford.

So long as he and others like him retain the externals of the indigent they are comparatively safe. But let

them assume a difference of demeanour, or try in any fashion to attain a more congenial mode of living, and they may reap the consequences of social conspicuousness in a political suspicion which may culminate in prosecution as an anti-revolutionist.

Meanwhile our Don Quixote of the threadbare coat took us to a dingy building, handing us over with a courtly bow to an alert official with quick eyes and a trim beard. But we were no nearer our goal. The official spoke neither English nor French, and his fluent German was of no use to us!

The Foreign Office, replete with maps, statistics, photographs, models, with its information-bureau and trained propagandists, did not include a single English- or French-speaking departmental head. We gathered by signs and motions and odd German words with a political significance that something more than mere registration was required, but just what the formalities might be remained a mystery. From this particular office we were taken to another, where we heard the word *Englieski* and gathered an interpreter would be forthcoming. But the hunt drew blank. He was not to be found, and a good-humoured crowd of clerks gathered round us gurgling with joy. Here at least was a quickened atmosphere. Depression, lethargy, the feeling that you were moving in a world not quite alive, all vanished. Everywhere was energy, vitality, infinite go and youth, above all else youth—eager-witted, quick-feeling, bubbling with enthusiasm. We caught the contagion of their outlook and exchanged innumerable unintelligible jokes.

But laughter did not solve the problem, and presently we went back to the first room, where we found a serious young woman about two-and-twenty conferring with the chief.

She was a most attractive creature, with large grave eyes, a white skin, and her shingled black head well set on her shoulders. Moreover—we could have hugged her in our joy—she could speak English—not fluently, but quite adequately. She had taught herself by books, but with the native genius of her race for languages had acquired a clear accent and a remarkably good pronunciation. She was, I gathered, a passport clerk, earning somewhere about thirty shillings a week. She explained that we must get immediate permission to travel about Russia; our visas merely gave us the right to enter, and did not authorize interior travel. To obtain the necessary facilities we should have to fill up a form and make a payment, when we could move about freely. It was at this moment that we realized that we had very little Russian money and asked if she would accept English. She looked at us in sheer amazement. It was forbidden. We could only change our money at the bank!

With the inevitable instructions clearly written we started off again, only to find the doors closed against us. The charming Sonia had assured us that the bank would be open till one-thirty, but though we got there by one there was nothing doing. Moreover, after repeated knockings, a really unpleasant Soviet soldier shooed us away.

Depressed and hungry, we went back. But Sonia

could not help us. Only the bank could change our money—the bank or the Foreign Minister himself, and the first was shut and the second not at home.

Still, he might perhaps be run to earth. She led the way to yet another room—it was quite like our own Downing Street—and introduced us to a nice young man named Jean, the Foreign Minister's secretary. Alas! he also was devoid of English and French, but his face was so expressive, his imagination so quick, that he registered his feelings and read ours with the swiftness of the movies.

At Sonia's instigation he telephoned here, there, and everywhere, and at last undaunted persistence located the Foreign Minister. He was, it seemed, at the exhibition just outside Minsk, one of the greatest, most memorable, most stupendous, etc., etc., ever seen! And neither London, Warsaw, New York, nor Berlin had ever heard of it! He might be coming back to his office that afternoon or maybe not till the evening. Meanwhile . . .

"Have you had dinner?" Sonia interrupted. "Poor things, you must be hungry. You must take them"—she addressed the secretary—"to the exhibition and give them food. You can find the Minister," she added brightly, "if he is still there."

I conjured up a long and dusty walk across the city. But Sonia had other plans. The one and only motor-car allowed to the Government of Minsk, the capital city of White Russia, was at the exhibition. It must immediately be brought back. The telephone got

going, and in some twenty minutes we were told it had arrived.

In curious contrast to the transport service the Russian telephone system is admirably run. You get through in record time, and the exchange is alert and understanding. We found it so, at any rate, though I admit we never used the instrument ourselves. Our friends always did the 'phoning for us.

The room where we waited was solidly furnished in a conventional style. The walls, of a dull brown, were decorated with huge portraits of Lenin, Stalin, and the President of the White Russian Republic. Long shelves were closely packed with books on economics, engineering, chemistry, and agriculture. Literature was there in plenty, and we were handed propaganda photographs of Soviet workshops, farms, and factories. There was a stir and energy about the place, and Jean seemed to have a grip of everything. He was short and rather narrow-chested, with a clean-shaven and very sensitive face. He lived, I should say, on nervous energy, and kept going on enthusiasm. He was consumed with fervour for the Soviet, his eyes glinted as he pointed to the posters—the old familiar posters of the giant tractors, which to him were fraught with all the power read by the devout into the relics of the Church. He was, I gathered, the son of a workman, and one of the first-fruits of the Revolution. Educated at the university, he had passed straight into the ministerial service. There are hundreds and thousands like him, with the same stark devotion, the same burning zeal, who under

the old *régime* would have remained hewers of wood, drawers of water, till the end of their lives. The Soviet has opened up unimaginable reaches of development and opportunity to the children of the proletariat and peasantry. They are the beginning of the new autocracy who will rule and possess the Russian earth.

The car, though shabby, was swift, and we were out of the city, its squalor and decay, and into the new town before I had realized the full significance of the change. It was a marvellous moment. Gone were the mean streets, aged houses, and decrepit people. Stagnation was suddenly charged with life. Factories, dwellings, clinics, hospitals, schools, were springing up on every side; wide roads were planted with trees; pleasantly planned flats courted the eye; clanging hammers, giant cranes, armies of workers, made the place hum and glow with energy. The old Minsk, with its tale of frustration, suffering, and disillusion, was left behind. Before us was a new chapter in the history of the nation—the chapter of the young.

The same thing is happening all over Russia. The dead cities are left to perish in their own decay; only those places that retain within themselves the principle of growth continue. And as with places so with people. Those who cannot reach out to new ideas, who cannot reinvigorate their roots, remain stagnant. For Soviet Russia is the country of the unafraid who, curious as to the future, are unabashed by the past.

We drove through the Proletarian Park, with its tall trees and flowering shrubs. Students from the university close by crowded the paths, streamed across

the grass. I caught a glimpse of the proletarian theatre, the proletarian *café*, crowded with boys and girls on the threshold of life, clean, upright, in brightly coloured shirts and blouses—I felt I had come into another country. Grave, earnest, with sudden flashes of laughter, these boys and girls carried themselves proudly—the heirs and inheritors of the new land.

I knew as I saw those strong and eager faces that it is the Russian youth who feed the flame of Communism throughout the U.S.S.R. To them the Soviet is an inspiration and an ecstasy, comparable only to the fierce ardour of a religious cause, for which they proudly live and would gladly die. They are the spontaneous missionaries and propagandists of the State, pledging themselves to new denials in their scanty fare, fulfilling heavy manual labour after a day in schools and lecture-halls, in the name of their religion, carrying the whole organization of the Young Communist Party on their unpaid shoulders.

Yes, youth has come to its full estate in Russia, but for the unhappy people left over from pre-Revolution days there is little hope. Dispossessed of their old life, too cowed and bewildered to understand the new, workers and *intelligentsia* alike are the helots of the cities. To-day has no use for yesterday in the U.S.S.R.

But in the midst of this amazing welter of upheaval, this far-reaching economic and social change, one thing remains stable and unchanging in the very stronghold of Communism itself. On the outskirts of the new Minsk, where the high road merges with the country, we passed a Greek Orthodox church. The

door was open, and the voice of the priest, clear and assured, came through. Old peasant women, young children, grey-headed men, were streaming into service. It was a saint's day, and they had brought gifts of eggs, bread, vegetables, flowers for the altar and kopeks for the offertory. The church, unlike the town, is old. The cupola, shining in the strong sun, has stood the storms of many generations.

I had thought to find the churches empty, the doors barred. The spectacle of these worshippers filling the temple of their fathers came to me with a shock of surprise. But not only in Minsk are the churches open—Catholic and Greek alike—but all over Russia they survive. Where the people wish to pray there also are places of worship, in standing confutation of the legend that religious service has been barred, and that only in secret and fearfulness may the believer pray to his God. The State does not recognize or endow any faith, but no embargo is placed on any church or synagogue supported by the contributions of the congregations. Where, however, these are not sufficient to provide for the upkeep of the building and the general maintenance of the clergy, the establishment is automatically closed down, to be used in many cases as a museum.

With the building so with the clerics. No priest as such is persecuted or imprisoned. Only when it is held, rightly or wrongly, that he has preached against the Soviet is he brought to trial. . . .

"Here," said Jean, speaking with his hands, "is the exhibition and, I hope, the Minister."

Chapter IV

PROPAGANDA LONG—FOOD SHORT

HERE is, alas! a strong family likeness between all exhibitions, but I was not prepared to find in Minsk a miniature Wembley. It was a serious proposition, designed to show the trades, industries, agriculture, and general developments of White Russia since the Soviet took charge. But at the same time it had its lighter moments. Bolshevist orchestras played *bourgeois* operas, giving *Madame Butterfly*, *Carmen*, and other well-worn strains with great effect. Illuminated fountains tinkled, and a giant racer tore up and down.

William Tell greeted us as we arrived, and Jean marched us proudly toward the Press pavilion, reeking with gigantic posters and proclamations. But before we got there I encountered one of the most poignant impressions of my life. Immediately fronting the main entrance, dominating the whole vast mass of buildings, was a gigantic statue of Lenin. His clenched hand reaching up toward the heavens as though in mastery of the Creator, his face invested even in imagery with superhuman force, he towered above the entire panorama, the symbol of the gigantic State machine he had laboured to construct.

Artistically a superb and terrifying piece of work, I felt at any moment that his stupendous hand might

descend upon my head, that his mouth, open in speech, might suddenly give forth sound. It shook me to the quick, and removed the exhibition from the Wembley category definitely and for ever.

All that day the vast excursions of workers and peasants, who from all parts of the country poured through the turnstiles, paused as one man inside the gates to salute the compelling figure of their idol. Fascinated, I watched their act of homage, spontaneous, incredibly moving. They turned to him as a god, they appealed to him as a saviour. They felt—and I felt with them—the flaming presence behind the hard, cold stone. Leninolatry has struck deep into the people. Already legends have gathered thick about his name, and I should say that eventually he will be numbered with the saints to whom millions of peasants still make petitions and offerings.

It is part of the Soviet policy to encourage the people to know their country and to grow familiar with the republics that make up the Union. For this reason throughout the spring and summer excursions are run at cheap rates, and thousands take advantage of the opportunity thus offered. They travel light, these parties, every man, woman, and youth carrying a rye loaf under his arm for provender, while the head of the family brandishes a metal teapot, refilled from the samovars at the railway buffets on the way. Clad in rags, not a decent boot or shoe among the lot, these proletariat bands which tour the country are an amazing sight. In the midst of the exhibition, all among the sparkling fountains

and flower-beds, they looked impossibly out of place. But—and this is what we felt all through our Russian venture—these ragged millions are the sign and source of the Soviet strength.

The Foreign Minister was not in the Press pavilion, and Jean, leaving us in the hands of a peasant lad in charge of the art section, went to unearth him somewhere else.

Blue-eyed, fair-haired, with the smile of a Giotto cherub, the boy brimmed with happiness. He escorted us proudly round the show, gesticulating all the while in a flood of unintelligible rhetoric. Machinery was the chief inspiration of the artists here exhibited. Giant cranes, massive tractors, complicated monsters of iron and steel, stood out from the canvas. War pictures also were there, but treated in a more conventional spirit, like the portraits of the revolutionary heroes. Karl Marx in a halo of white whiskers was first favourite after Lenin, who figured at every age in every posture, from baby petticoats to reverent baldness, the two men being usually side by side. If, as is reported, Stalin intends to supplant Christianity by a Soviet Trinity he will, it is thought, choose Karl Marx as the Father, Lenin as the Son, while Lord Passfield may be nominated as Bolshevism's Holy Ghost.

Adjoining the art exhibits was the children's section. Poor, small Soviet souls! The Kremlin in its wisdom has prohibited the manufacture of senseless toys, substituting cubes, triangles, circles, squares, and other geometrical forms in their place. The Bolshie baby must have a soul above mere woolly

lambs and other beautifully idiotic objects and cut its teeth on a parallelogram or a sphere! We saw, however, the most fascinating models of aeroplanes, tractors, and engines, the work of little boys, and a glass case full of the daintiest shoes of kid, satin, and other fabrics manufactured by students, not for home consumption, but for the export trade.

It was wonderfully interesting, but extremely tiring, and I suddenly felt a dreadful desire for food. Happily Jean rescued us and took us to the restaurant where the Foreign Minister had been located. It was our first Russian meal, our first experience of the country's daily menu, and, as often happens in such circumstances, neither the service nor the dishes were typical. Minister Oulianov gave us an animated welcome. A thin, eager-looking man with kind, tired eyes and a sharp beard, his clothes were whole but cheap, and he wore the inevitable tweed cap—we never saw a felt hat all the time we were in Russia. He was extraordinarily touched at our arrival. He had never seen a foreign journalist before, and now not only I and my friend, but two American Pressmen, had unexpectedly found their way to Minsk from Moscow. It was a gala day for the exhibition and the Minister. We were, it seemed, the first English people who had visited the capital since the War.

His welcome, I should explain, was translated by one of the Americans, who expressed unqualified astonishment at our being there.

I shall always regard it as an amazing piece of luck that we should have run across the man who, I suppose,

knows more about this particular part of Russia than anyone outside the country. I had heard of Maurice Hindus and had read his volcanic book *Humanity Uprooted*, which unfolds the possibilities as well as the actual conditions of Soviet government, but I had never hoped to meet him in the Republic of which he has made a particular study. Born under the Tsarist régime, at fourteen Hindus made his way to the States and became a naturalized citizen. But the Revolution of 1918, with its sweeping economic upheaval, brought him back in eager curiosity and expectation. Since then he has spent some months each year in the Russian villages, State farms, and Collectivist communas, understanding with a simple completeness the complications and the possibilities of the Five Years Plan. And this was the man whom, after travelling for two thousand miles, we had the good fortune to meet at luncheon.

The table was neatly spread with a white cloth, and the service was quite tolerable. I was helped to cabbage soup, a glass of beer, and a plate of veal cutlets. Bunny, not so lucky, was given *kasha*, a kind of small rice and stewed cow.

Then, almost with the first mouthful, Hindus opened fire.

"What are you doing here?"

That was easy.

"How did you get through?"

I rehearsed the story of our Odyssey.

"And you can't speak a word of the language? Why, you must be mad!"

I did not agree with the corollary, but he continued the barrage.

"Look here," he said, "it's really dangerous for you two to wander about alone. I admit it's plucky and all that, but you oughtn't to do it. You simply can't go through Russia by yourselves. You don't know what may happen."

"What could happen?" I asked, remembering our tremors of the night before and their calm sequel. "I don't believe we could come to any harm," I insisted. "I always find that if you behave decently to people they are quite all right to you. Besides, why *should* anyone hurt us? We have very little money, no valuables, and are not in the least afraid."

"It won't do," he insisted. "You must go home at once—or at any rate leave Russia."

It was no use to argue. He was obsessed with the American belief in the fragility of woman, and could not stomach the notion of our tramping around all unprotected and without the security of a good bed and proper food! So I just smiled, asked for a cigarette, and agreed to pack up at the earliest opportunity. Meanwhile I wanted nothing better than to listen to him. The Minister, watching us eagerly, chipped in.

A great and unexpected honour had fallen on his city! Yet another journalist had dropped from the clouds and was waiting at that moment on the 'phone.

The fifth correspondent, it seemed, wanted a visa to go through Russia to his native Stockholm. The trouble was that not a soul could understand a word

he said. He spoke the universal language of Esperanto, and found himself totally uncomprehended! Hindus came to the rescue with a smattering of Norwegian, which the representative of the Esperanto journal condescended to use. Poor man, I shall never forget his appearance when we saw him some hours later, tired, hungry, and unutterably wretched—he had been travelling for hours without sleep or food.

The ministerial lunch over, we started off once more to see the exhibition. Now the Russians have always been experts in propaganda, but under the Soviet publicity has become a fine art. Every one of those ragged hordes who day after day bowed the knee to Lenin's statue went home with the conviction that Soviet prosperity, security, and possibilities were matters of holy writ. On all sides specimens of rye, barley, oats—the results of cross-breeding—thrust out full ears. Everywhere young, ardent agriculturists told the tale, rehearsing unweariedly the number of bushels raised per acre two years ago, last year, this year, the output rapidly rising with each division of time.

"It is facts they are spilling," explained Hindus. "I know all the farms they are talking about. A few years ago they were just waste ground, sandy, unprofitable. To-day they are humming with activity, rich in all kinds of crops. There are hundreds of State and Collectivist farms in White Russia alone."

I did not at the time grasp the distinction between the two forms of agricultural activity, but I was able

MY RUSSIAN VENTURE

to realize that the Soviet apples on view were very pleasant to look at and quite luscious to taste.

"This," said a pretty girl—a double first, or the Russian equivalent, in the science of fruit-breeding—"is a special variety. It is a cross between the English Ribston pippin and a native fruit. We grow it specially for the British markets."

That, I admit, was a nasty shock, remitted by Hindus's kindly and most untiring translation. I remembered the hundreds and thousands of apples I had seen rotting in Gloucestershire one year, because, they told me, it simply would not pay to send them up to London. Apparently it pays the Soviet very well, for the import of White Russian apples is persistently on the up-grade.

The much debated Russian wheat, however, is not raised in this republic. The soil is too poor. But potatoes, also for Great Britain, flourish in undiminished vigour, and—unkindest cut of all—they are breeding pigs from our own Berkshire hogs in order to supply us with bacon. The placid, grunting creatures lay in the model sties, pictures of content and cleanliness. The newest, most scientific apparatus was displayed in sheds and stables, fitted with automatic water-troughs which give out fresh supplies as the creatures drink. And these, animals and accessories alike, were not for exhibition purposes alone. We met their kind in duplicate all over Russia.

We were not allowed, however, to sip lightly at the instructional cup. Every visitor was strenuously

fed with solid fact, packed so tightly to the square inch that unaccustomed flesh and blood could not bear up against it, and we took refuge in a herb garden full of every imaginable kind of medicinal plant, from castor-oil to belladonna.

But even here there was no peace. The voice of the propagandist still pursued us, explaining the use of every leaf, the properties of each scrap of herbage. These also—the facts and the flowers—were destined for export. I began to feel that Great Britain was going to be fed and dosed exclusively by Soviet enterprise.

At this point Hindus's companion, a tall, square-shouldered, 100-per-cent. American he-man, with incredibly trusting blue eyes, broke a long and mournful silence. In a slow drawl he gave us the information that he had discovered something worth while. He had! We were conducted to a miniature liqueur factory and given large glasses of the most ingratiating cherry brandy and other of the country's vintages.

After the liqueur the blue-eyed boy became loquacious, and insisted that he wanted to climb Lenin's statue and take a picture of the entire show. We also had a camera, but of the midget variety. It had been a sore point with all our friends. Anyone, we were told, discovered taking Soviet pictures would be rushed to gaol. But neither in London nor at Negoreloje had any question been raised as to its possession, and we were left quite free to take what photographs we liked without surveillance. Bunny

went off to get some snaps, and I talked to one of the pretty little agriculturists, all shingled hair and dimples. I learned through Hindus that she, like the rest, had received a Government subsidy as a university student which enabled her to pay for lodging and food, and that now at twenty-two years of age she was earning 150 roubles a month on a large fruit farm. She came from that peasant stock which before the Revolution could neither read nor write, and under the old *régime* would have slaved like an ox on her father's plot of land, or have been exploited at a starvation wage by a local farmer.

This entire overthrow of the social and economic life under which millions of peasants groaned for generations has lit up the countryside with a glow of hope that not all the rags, the lack of boots, the unvarying diet of bread and tea on which the nation as a whole exists, can extinguish. It is this general planning for improved conditions allied with incredible discomfort and that perpetual ignoring of the individual typical of the Soviet which is so difficult to reconcile. For as we passed through beautifully ordered jam-making stalls, noting the accuracy and precision of every arrangement, I could not help remembering the disorder and the dirt of the First Soviet Hotel, and the extraordinary disregard for personal comfort which makes it possible to keep a city the size of Minsk dependent on a belated tram service and the broken-down droshky.

In the Soviet cities you feel that the unit of the family or the claims of the man in the street do not

exist. In the view of the Kremlin the comfort or convenience of a person or persons does not count. The one paramount and urgent consideration is the State, its well-being, its prosperity, its security, apart and distinct from the rights of the citizen.

For this reason in the midst of the latest and best-equipped machinery ragged men and women abound. Every effort is centred on the supreme mechanization of the country. To this end the natural wealth is used not for the immediate advantage of the population, but for the acquisition of more and more tractors, engines of all kinds and sorts, for which meat and leather, shoes and clothes, are remorselessly exported.

At this point, however, I must very definitely challenge the statement current in the English Press that the Russian nation is starving because of the exportation of wheat. This is not so. The people do not eat and never have eaten white bread. The Russians, like the Poles, consume rye bread—the rye bread which is sold in Soho *cafés* as a *delicatessen*. Palatable, nourishing, it is a bone-making, muscle-building food on which millions exist. . . .

All day long the crowds continued to troop in with their loaves. I watched their faces, fascinated. It soon became less difficult to pick out the peasants from the proletariat: the countryman, free-moving, with impregnable nervous reserves; the townsman in the twenties, quick, expectant, becoming gradually less vital in the thirties, harassed and depressed, with a jagged, almost a furtive energy.

What lay behind that frayed and haggard look?

MY RUSSIAN VENTURE

Even on that afternoon I sensed something of the strain at which the city dweller lives. The intensive Soviet propaganda canalizes every department of activity to one end and one end only—the supremacy of the State. I suddenly felt the purpose of those glaring and hot-coloured Government posters. Wherever I looked I was pursued by the demands of the U.S.S.R., pictures of tractors and yet more tractors essential to the success of the Five Years Plan. All individual needs seemed to break before the blast of that nerve-racking energy, until at last the length and breadth of Russia's vast expanse became one huge ache for machines.

From tractors my eyes moved to the punishment of the exploiter. Even in the midst of the flower-beds I was confronted by the picture of a Kulak being flogged. Always I seemed to hear the call to work—to sacrifice. "It is the cause. It is the cause," my soul re-echoed everywhere.

The people are kept continually on the *qui vive*. Every day brings a new slogan from the Kremlin; the wireless night and morning blares forth for fresh denials, renewed efforts. The papers scream with suppressed hysteria.

This perpetual propagandist urge acts like a lash on a numbed nerve. Life in the old cities, and in the new towns, is so tense that if emotional flogging were to cease the will of the people might collapse before the Five Years Plan is completed.

Soviet youth, like a young eagle, lifts proud eyes to the sun. It is in the thirties that the burden

of standardization begins to tell on it. This at least was what I found in the provincial towns we visited. Life in the country has another and a different rhythm.

We left the exhibition in the Government motor-car, which dropped us at the hotel. Our room had been cleaned, though the why or wherefore of this attention was never made known to us. Five minutes' rest and a wash and brush-up and we were once more on the go. The problems of the visa and more Russian money were still unsolved. But we were told that late that night, when Oulianov had returned, we should find both at his office.

And so, with some hours to spare, we discovered those parts of the old city which the morning's quest had left unrevealed.

The open market surprised us. Reports have it that the Soviet has suppressed all individual barter. But here again, while the law prohibits private trading, there still exists a small loophole through which you may buy and sell.

It reminded us, but with a very vital difference, of the market at Nieuswicz, in White Ruthenia. There was the same crowd of peasants, but none of them wore sheepskin coats, and the gaily coloured shawls had grown very dingy. They had come in from miles around, bringing their wares by rail, on foot, or in *teliegas*, the springless wooden carts common to Russia and Poland. There was none of the clatter and movement, the colour and mirth, inseparable from the ordinary market-day. It struck us as a rather forlorn affair.

Pears, tomatoes, cabbages, apples, beetroots, and onions were spread on the stalls, but even the vegetables looked dejected, and the purchasers were listless and uninterested. A few women were hawking brown rolls, and a small, enterprising boy was crying new-laid eggs. There was no butter, nor cheese, nor any kind of meat.

These last are obtainable only by food-tickets issued by the State. The individual peasants, however, who still prefer their native plots with all the lack of convenience and remoteness to the larger and fuller life of the Collectivist farm, are permitted to trade the vegetables and brown rolls, fruit, etc., raised by the family labour. In no case, however, must a peasant employ an additional hand. That is exploitation.

The State is the one and only employer.

Most of these peasants struck me as incredibly hardy. Life in this part of the U.S.S.R. is a prolonged wrestle against climate and soil. They still carry on, however; later we came into direct contact with their lives and homes.

The State is also the sole trader; but here again we found a chink in the shoe and boot business which enables some at least of the people to retain a semblance of footgear. At a street corner, under an archway up an alley, you will find a little cobbler at work, soleing, heeling, stitching, while his customers wait. Very swift and clever, he performs miracles in the way of patches, and by the exercise of extraordinary craftsmanship seems to enable the most shapeless shoe to acquire a kind of contour. New shoes and boots are high-priced and difficult to obtain. The export

trade swallows them up, and for this reason the cobbler taps away day after day.

But—he alone may do the work. He must not employ an assistant. If his own labour does not keep him he can enter the Government boot store and receive a wage. He is free to choose—but he is not free to make profit on the labour of another. That is the kernel of Soviet economics.

Other little trades are run in the same way. Small dressmakers may make up your garments. Their families may help, but no wages must be paid, no regular assistance demanded. Manicurists also do private work, and up to within a year ago hairdressers also. Now, however, all individual shingling, Marcel waving, etc., is prohibited, and whatever your requirements they must be executed by the Government *friseur*.

Here again, however, the individual has to give way to the machinery of the State. You book your appointment, but you cannot officially arrange for your pet assistant. You must take whoever happens to be free—man or woman. State hairdressing, however, seems to be quite smart. All the girls and most of the women in the U.S.S.R. are shingled, and their heads are smoothly brushed and nicely dressed.

After six o'clock the streets grew more crowded, and I noticed that the young people were coming back from the new town. The trams were a seething mass of humanity; no restriction exists as to the number of passengers, and quite as many were clinging to the outside as were seated inside.

MY RUSSIAN VENTURE

It was at the top of the main street at Minsk that we noticed suddenly and startlingly a pretty girl in a decently cut raincoat, silk stockings, and a pair of scarlet shoes. She was daintily made up, and there was a certain something in her walk and in her glance that suggested that she might be a daughter of joy. She was certainly most joyous in that grey street. Presently she met a friend, a young man in a blue blouse shirt, and they went off together arm in arm, her red shoes flashing colour all along the pavement.

This particular lady and others of her profession are not in Government service. They are not registered as workers, and therefore have no food-tickets nor official housing space, but if the Soviet has no care for the amenities of life it has also no concern as to the methods by which those who do not wish to work exist. Brothels are not allowed. They are an extreme form of exploitation and as such are prohibited, but the little individual prostitute who selects that mode of life, precarious as it is, may pick up what she can to keep herself. Even in Communist Russia the oldest profession in the world continues to exist, and still contrives to gather pretty clothes and dainty shoes—the one type throughout the U.S.S.R. who can lay claim to being well turned out.

She was only a bird of passage to us at Minsk. Later on I had an opportunity of finding out the psychological and social reasons which keep the numbers of the profession very small.

There is another caste which does not work to eat in Soviet Russia. The beggars who flourished under

the Tsarist *régime* still persist under the Bolshevists. That afternoon they were very much in evidence. A broken-down woman put out a quavering hand for a few kopeks. She must have been somewhere about seventy, and under the provisions of the law could have drawn sustenance from the State, however limited. But she, like others, preferred the wandering life of the vagabond with all its chances and changes, sometimes starving, sometimes doing fairly well, yet always free from regulated existence. There are beggars of all ages, but they do not afflict you with the pathos you feel for their prototypes in other countries. For—and you cannot get past the knowledge—if they are strong work is waiting for them, if they are feeble they can go to a sanatorium, and if they are old they can be provided for outside the workhouse.

And yet, in spite of economics, it always gave me a twinge when, as we sipped our tea and ate our rye bread in a station buffet, not one but three or four furtive souls would stretch forth eager fingers and fall to eating a crust with immediate and undoubted hunger.

State ownership and beggars, model farms and rags, prostitutes in red shoes and working women with none—the contradictions and inexplicabilities of Soviet Russia remained entralling to the end.

We returned to the Foreign Office about eight o'clock. But time is not in Russia, and Oulianov had not come back. Jean, however, was waiting for us, and we whiled away the time with the Esperanto correspondent, who, poor soul, still waited also, and a

pantomime exchange of ideas with the secretary, who was rapidly growing even more expert than Bunny.

He had been on duty, that young man, since eight o'clock that morning, and, as he showed us by pointing to the hands of his watch, did not expect to get away till midnight. This was not an unusual or an extraordinary thing. The Soviet official of his age spends the greater part of existence in furthering the cause. Hours mean nothing, hunger means little more. How and when they sleep I never could find out.

The Foreign Minister's living-room joined the office, and we made the acquaintance of his little daughter, a very charming child of about ten. Blooming and fragrant as a daffodil, the stress and strain of life had not touched her yet, though she was, I gathered, earmarked for the Soviet Secretariat. Madame Minister was not yet home. She also was working late in another Government department.

At last, at very long last, Oulianov, strained and pale, but still fired with energy, turned up and attended to our business. In possession of money, the next point to decide was where we were going to eat.

Hurrah for the Stars and Stripes! Hindus and his blue-eyed friend had sent a note to say that they would call for us at the hotel and show us the ropes for supper.

Chapter V

WE TAKE THE OPEN ROAD

THAT was a marvellously crowded evening. Not knowing what to expect, and conscious of the lack of food-tickets, we had spread our table with the slowly shrinking ham and other comestibles which, as time wore on and nobody appeared, we were sorely tempted to eat. We were, however, spared from stale Polish bread and the rest. Hindus suggested we should go out with him and the blue-eyed boy and hunt around. He explained that foreigners are not given ration-cards. They may eat what they can get and are able to pay for in restaurants and hotels. The menu, however, as we discovered, is very limited. Butter is so rare that its appearance is as unexpected as it is costly, while cheese, save in minute and expensive fragments, does not exist. Meat again is very limited—we only ate it twice all the time we were in the U.S.S.R. The supply is short and the variety *nil*—cow, cow, and cow again, stewed or fried, until this amiable animal becomes an object of repulsion.

Meanwhile Hindus led the way to a restaurant attached to the hotel where he and his friend were staying. A large room full of tables, crowded with men and women, boys and girls, literally clamouring for food. There were no cloths, and spoons and forks,

etc., were brought with the orders. Some few lucky ones were already consuming cabbage soup, with huge chunks of rye bread, but the majority were still hungry.

Time went on, but nothing happened. The crowds simply sat and waited, till the spectacle of their inoperative patience drove me mad. The hopelessness, the weird incompetence of those Russian restaurants! You sit and sit, and grow angry and get restless, and beat your spoon—if you have one—on the table, but all to no purpose. “*Saychass*”—“Presently”—says the waiter or the waitress, and *saychass* it is. Most disconcerting and dispiriting of words, it dogs your life in Russia. Where is the train—the train that should have come nine hours ago? “*Saychass*,” says the slow Russian voice. *Saychass* for your food, your drink, for anything and everything concerned with social as apart from State service.

Fresh crowds hung about the tables. Chairs and more chairs were brought, forms were fetched, humanity packed tight as a drum. But the service never quickened, the few solitary eaters sitting in their isles of satisfaction, like jewels in a dull sea. More and more people poured through the doors. It became difficult to breathe.

Students in jumpers and in blouse shirts talked over bare tables, their eager faces fixed in attention, their deep eyes welling with fervour. Few of these young things live at home; they put up at hostels, lodging-houses, or tuck in with a friend. They are as migratory in their habits as our bright young people of the

West End, but, however unordered their external life, interiorly they are keyed up to a disciplined resolve.

"There's no chance of getting anything for hours," said Hindus. "There aren't enough restaurants to go round in Minsk, and only two of them keep open late."

I concluded in my ignorance that those who could not get attention in the public eating-places would go back home for supper. But it was gradually borne in on me that family meals are no longer part of the domestic *régime*. Breakfast, the universal breakfast of rye bread, apple jam, and tea, is still taken in the home by those who do not stay in lodging-houses or hotels. But midday dinner or evening supper is another matter. These are eaten at the club for male and female employees attached to every bank, store, and ministerial department throughout the country. In these places, for a less sum than it would cost at home, you may have what you want or can get. Outside the clubs there are only the restaurants, which, devoid even of the mild control exercised by the club committee, are run on the most haphazard and indifferent lines.

Restaurateurs, like the compilers of time-tables, are no more in Russia. The catering business, like railway control, calls for the experience and organizing power implicit of middle-class genius. And with the abolition of the middle class these two particular deficiencies have come to stay.

Trains will be lost, meals mislaid, until the Russian youth gains its own experience and tabulates its own

conclusions, which, as the majority of lads seem to turn to the productive rather than to the distributive sections of life, will probably be a very long time.

In the interim, in the entire absence of competition, the State restaurant's execrable service holds its own.

"I'm tired of this," said the blue-eyed boy. "Let's have some food upstairs in our room."

But here once more the difficulty of hot water impeded progress, for without hot water we could not have tea, and it seemed that even Hindus could not procure any. What exactly are the rules that govern 'making tea' outside a hotel restaurant for those who cannot get any inside I could never fathom. The samovar bubbled cheerfully downstairs, but that did not help a bit, and only after prolonged negotiations did we acquire a pint of the precious liquid, and, there being no gas-stove or other means of lighting a fire, we put up with it lukewarm. But it was worth while waiting. Hindus produced some real Russian tea which sugar and lemon made perfect, and we all sat down to brown bread, biscuits and chocolate, apples and jam, with great gusto. It was a regular picnic. The men produced tin travelling-mugs and a spare knife from their haversacks, but otherwise we were quite primitive. They were off next morning to some White Russian villages, where they were staying with the peasants. They took with them friendly offerings for the whole community—sugar for this one, tobacco for the other, biscuits, sweets, and tins of cocoa. They were travelling miles into the interior, far from the railway, where the *teliega* is the only method of

transport over rough tracks that cannot be called a road.

From the villages they proposed to revisit State and Collectivist farms we had already heard so much about; and as it is essential for anyone seriously concerned with Russian economics clearly to understand the difference between these two forms of agricultural activity, I take this opportunity of explanation.

The fundamental ideal of Stalin is undoubtedly a cast-iron system of State ownership, under which everybody automatically becomes the servant of the Government. The goal, however, is a long way ahead, and has receded farther since the success of the Collectivist rather than the State farm.

The latter are run on factory lines by Government money, and employ the workers as wage-earners pure and simple.

The Collectivist farms, on the other hand, raise the capital to work the land, leased by the State, from the peasants, who are allotted shares at one rouble fifty kopeks to two roubles fifty each—*i.e.*, according to the amount of their subscriptions in cash or in kind; the poorer the peasant the cheaper the share. It is, however, an unbreakable rule that only those who actually work upon the land may take shares. Communas, as these places are called, are managed by the elected representatives of the farm-workers, who are quite independent of Government control.

Further, the difference between the cost of raising and the price of selling the produce is divided *pro rata* between the shareholders, after payment of wages

and the replenishment of stock. The State as sole purchaser buys at a fixed rate.

We learned these things by experience and inquiry. Our conclusions were checked by documents gathered as we went and translated on our return home. Side by side with State ownership, State control, State service, and State rationing exists a system which, founded on co-operative labour, admits individual profit.

It is this spirit of collectivization that has stemmed the tide of Marxist socialism, with its elimination of personal property.

How the two systems contrast in fundamentals and expression we were to see later.

Meanwhile the contrast between the old Minsk and the new still held me. Minsk used to be a commercial centre, with big fur, wood, and leather factories. Trade was almost entirely in the hands of the Jews, who bought and sold, controlled prices, and made profits. With the abolition of private trading—save for the few small individual callings I have mentioned—the Jews were left without any means of livelihood but manual labour. They found, however, a way out. They went on to the land, worked it, and made it pay, and at the moment there are quite a number of Jewish communas.

Thus the Jews are no longer parasites, no longer compelled to be parasites. It was, I felt, a great thing to have set them free to settle on the land from which the Tsars kept them for generations.

So short—in terms of years—since Minsk was run

and owned by private trade! And now the shop-keeper, the factory owner, the lawyer, the doctor, and the rest are controlled and employed by the Soviet.

It gave me a creepy feeling, for all our good cheer. I decided that if ever I were domiciled in Russia nothing would keep me in the cities. Town born and bred as I am, I felt that the air of State ownership would choke me, and I hungered for the countryside.

There was little to keep us in Minsk. The factories differed not a whit from their European counterparts; the food queues lining up for sugar and bread were familiar from the days of the War, and the schools and clinics patiently laboured after the Western pattern. When, therefore, Hindus returned to his old plaint and urged the danger of our remaining unshepherded we thanked him very kindly and agreed to move on. He so far gave way as to allow us to return *via* Kiev, on the south-west border, instead of going back by way of Stolpce, but insisted that we must arrange for seats that night—trains, as we knew, were few and far between. Accordingly we trapsed back to the Foreign Office, where we found Jean still at work. The kind creature promised to call for us at the hotel with the tickets and see us on our journey.

Hindus, apparently relieved, said he would come round also, and in a state of blissful excitement we walked home. It was a warm and very lovely evening. The soft shadows hid the gaping holes in the roadway, the bald patches on the houses, turning the poor old tortured city into a place of haunting tenderness. An aged woman sat peacefully in her doorway,

MY RUSSIAN VENTURE

a young girl laughed good-night to her lad. It seemed a thousand years since we had arrived as frightened wayfarers.

Cerberus, back on duty, smiled pleasantly as we entered. The buxom waiting-maid greeted us. Even the old white wolf seemed to bare a friendly fang.

That night we had a bed each—Hindus had explained our requirements—and very glad we were to snuggle into the pillows.

"But," I said firmly to myself, "we are not going direct to Kiev all the same. We shall travel some miles down the line and then stop at the station that attracts us. I am not leaving White Russia without seeing the villages and meeting the peasants for Hindus or anybody else."

The soft blue light streamed through the bare windows. Somewhere in the town a clock struck one, missed two, and delivered a cracked three. On the table with the soiled cloth I could just distinguish the outlines of three pots of apple jam, two bottles of cranberry jelly, six apples, and three pears—exhibition trophies which the pretty agricultural experts had pressed upon us. The girls' bright faces and glowing eyes smiled back at me. The ragged crowds streamed up the dusty roads, turning toward Lenin as Christians turn toward the East. The heavy ears of barley bowed to me in greeting, and hungry throngs waited in vain at empty tables, longing for food. A country of a thousand marvels, tabulated to the last inch, we had not met an expected moment nor an anticipated fact since we came.

It was some time before the mental movie faded out. . . .

It is, I suppose, the heaviness of winter that hangs on the Russian soul, so that at all times and places the people fall placidly to rest. To me the air was so invigorating that I needed but a modicum of sleep, and was up and doing early the next morning.

Packing was the first consideration. By this time we loathed our light dresses, spurned our top-coats, and wished we could travel in our costumes and leave the rest behind. The jars of jam made things more difficult. We wished to preserve these fruits of the Russian earth, and if possible bring them to London, but in spite of all our contriving we could succeed in making room for only three.

It was a question not only of space, but of safe transport. The jars, of the thinnest possible glass, were fitted not with corks, but with wooden stoppers. We had seen several hundreds of girls meticulously adjusting them, shaving a bit off here and there; but, alas! Soviet intelligence did not grasp the fact that while cork expands under constriction wood remains static, and as a consequence thin streams of *confiture* were already exuding. We left the rest of the jam behind with the remnants of the Polish ham, the butter, grown dreadfully soft, some sugar, and some stale rolls, and we decided to have breakfast in the hotel if only we could find the coffee-room. But innumerable doors bearing unintelligible hieroglyphics baffled us, and we dared not enter in case we found ourselves *de trop*. At last we came across a door ajar, and, gently pushing

it, found ourselves in a long, gaunt apartment with counter and samovar complete, the tables covered with American cloth, with an aspidistra in the centre!

It had never occurred to me that this repulsive and complacent plant could flourish so far from its native heath. Indigenous to the suburbs, I have seen it in French provincial creameries and the like. But the idea of this most respectable and *bourgeois* vegetable bursting forth on a Soviet breakfast-table was completely comic. The seats—chairs and forms—were full of shirt-bloused occupants, with a sprinkling of jacketed young men. This sartorial difference does not signify any social distinction. You may be a bank clerk, ministerial official, even a Secretary of State, but your costume varies only with your taste and the age of your garments. Some of the men were unshaven, but most of them looked neat and well turned out.

There were only two women, both in the thirties, bareheaded and dressed in drab skirts and blouses. Hotels are mostly used by men, though there is no sex bar, and the young people have their own particular haunts.

Breakfast was in steady progress: the inevitable rye bread, apple jam, and tea sugared, but without lemon or milk. The hotel residents brought their own loaf, from which they cut large hunks. Customers from the outside bought their slices from the counter. We followed suit, lining up with the rest, and carried our glasses, apple jam, etc., back to the table. The tea was quite good, as was the bread and jam. We

enjoyed both that morning, but the novelty of the fare had not worn off. Later I realized how flatly this standardized repast must lie upon the spirits of the nation. The poorest in another country, given the money, has a choice of food. But here the gates of opportunity are fast. Bread and jam, and bread and jam, and bread and jam—my soul rose in revolt.

How could they bear it?

Why did they endure it?

Close on the queries came the reply. So long as no one else has a preferential fare, and everybody eats the same, the itch of discontent, the burden of surfeit, disappears.

After all, it is inevitably something of a reproach over creamy coffee and hot rolls to remember those international unfortunates with only stale bread, margarine, and cocoa.

There was little conversation. Most of the people read their newspaper, some looked at their letters, and the bank clerks sorted their leather wallets. No one addressed us or indeed took any notice of us, and for a wonder the whitewashed walls were bare of posters or of portraits. The manageress served us most politely, and the charge for our meal compared with what we subsequently had to pay was phenomenally low—forty kopeks each, or less than two and sixpence for both.

Hindus arrived a little later with some new brown rolls for the journey and a final warning as to getting away quickly. I have never met him since, but his memory remains indelibly keen. A man of wide mental range and infinite kindness, with a rooted

admiration and belief in Soviet Russia, he could not feel at ease while we remained lodged within her territories!

We paid our bill at the office—a very moderate total—less than five roubles for the two nights, including the visitors' tax. We gave Cerberus a rouble and endowed the buxom waiting-maid, who, in an access of honesty, pursued us to the door with the remnants of the Polish ham.

It was an amazing proof of fundamental principle. To the meat-hungry Russian ham is worth more than rubies or much gold, for neither money nor jewels can purchase any—cow is the only flesh procurable—and here was a succulent portion ready to hand, and the girl refrained from taking it. Personally, we always found both hotel staffs and officials most scrupulously honest.

The Minister's car, miraculously punctual, arrived with Jean. It seemed impossible to believe that the train would follow suit, and as a matter of fact it did not. Word had been received that my lord the locomotive had tarried by the way and would not turn up at Minsk till some hours after the listed time.

Jean, however, proposed to escort us to the station, arrange our seats, and leave us in a carriage until the errant engine should arrive. He looked tired that morning, but was as alert as ever, and seated us neatly in the car. We exchanged cards *en route* and promised to renew our friendship—still in pantomime—unfailingly. A wistful personality, with a sacrificial genius and a lovely sense of humour, he should, I feel, go far in the service of his Republic.

I cannot picture him in the Kremlin. He belongs properly to Minsk, where on that summer morning he carried our bags, bought us apples, and, like a guardian angel, sped us on our way.

It had been a breathless experience. Since we had left Stolpce nothing had happened according to prophecy or supposition. We had not been chivvied or chased, regimented or officially instructed. We had seen what we wished, gone where we wanted, and neither commissars nor Ogpus had stood in our way.

The station, as usual, teemed with sleeping humanity spread all over the place. One of the oldest Russian folk-tales tells of a peasant who, continually hungry for sleep, slumbered away three-and-thirty years on end, and then, yawning, turned over on the other side. When he at last awoke he was so strong that he could have pushed the world right over. For this reason and in this hope the Soviet peasant still sleeps how and when he can. It seems to me quite probable that when at last he does awake he may refashion the whole world to a new economic mould.

Jean had taken 'soft' seats for us, and we had an uninterrupted view of the sleeping populace and potential passengers from the window. Students were flocking on to the platform, hatless and healthy, the boys in blouse shirts and shorts, the girls in the drab-coloured skirts that Russian womanhood has perforce adopted as showing less of life's wear and tear than brighter hues, with aged raincoats or capes. They were all quite innocent of make-up, without even

a touch of powder, and they had none of those feminine fripperies that Eve delights in. Barelegged or in woollen stockings—silk was conspicuously absent—their footgear was invariably patched, gloves entirely absent, and dainty handbags, beads, buttonholes, etc., were not to be seen.

Femininity is stripped of all external allurements. The young things in their eager strength and quickly coursing blood do not seem to miss such decoration. But the older women have a dull, almost a bleak appearance. The absence of artificial complexion does not arise from Puritan distrust of the pomps of the flesh, nor does lack of means account for it. Soviet beauty shops are few and far between, but some sort of 'aids' are still obtainable. The general abstinence from facial arrangement, as I see it, is due to the utter lack of bodily adornment, which has left the Russian woman void of vanity. Whether this be a desirable condition or otherwise depends upon the point of view. Personally, I regret it.

Old grannies carried pails of water upon a yoke, and did a brisk business at a kopek a glass. Small boys hawked brown rolls and apples and occasionally new-laid eggs to supplement the travelling loaf. There are no restaurant cars in Russia, except, I believe, upon the tourist routes, and only bread and tea and mineral waters are available at the station buffet. Peasant families transferred themselves with babies and baggage to their wooden seats and shelves—and over all the strong sun steadily shone, the flies buzzed—and the train stood still.

Life was so full of interest to us, so vivid with incident, that we found our interludes of physical inactivity most refreshing. We were able slowly to look about and to take in. Already our eyes had grown accustomed to the general aspect of poverty, and we no longer reacted against the dead level of apparent indigence. We could more correctly gauge the slow gathering force of national resilience.

Presently a Bolshevik officer pushed his way through the crowd and chose a seat in our carriage. We were conscious of his hostile, curious glance. As foreigners, I suppose we naturally excited his suspicions; but he struck a little chill on that friendly day, and we felt it would be well to establish diplomatic relations. Though grim and implacable, he was almost as easy to approach as Stonehenge, and quite as aloof. Very tall, squarely built, with fine shoulders and broad chest, he had the clean-shaven face, the deep-sunk eyes, of an inquisitor, plus a big, generous, but tight-lipped mouth. But, remembering the Gleam, I felt somehow that he might melt.

Gradually the carriage filled up. A weedy bank clerk, with thin legs stuck into gaping shoes, munched rye bread. A young doctor—we could tell him by his little black bag—read aloud from the daily *Pravda*, pointing the paragraphs with explanatory hands. A tired woman in the forties, with a huge portfolio, read documents with peering and short-sighted eyes. But still we did not budge! I felt, indeed, as if we had been living in that train for years, and it was with quite a shock that a little later

MY RUSSIAN VENTURE

I realized we were indubitably on the move. On either side the low-lying plains sloped to the far horizon. Now and again we overtook a peasant digging his lonely plot, a small child tending a solitary cow. We passed small villages, outlying cottages, far distant and remote from human kind. As we went on, however, the earth showed traces of organized skill. The crops were rich, apples and pears weighed heavily on the trees. We caught a glimpse of farm buildings, neatly painted, prosperous, teeming with human life. It was a slow train, stopping at every station, large or small. At each place the old woman hawked water, small boys took round fruit, and always heaps of peasants crowded the platform, swarmed on the trains, and fell asleep.

I shall never forget my first sight of one of those peasant armies. The train slowed up, the station opened out. In full spate a rush of tattered figures, barefooted and unshaven, flooded the track, chattering, shouting, leaping. The old nursery rhyme, instinct with meaning, came back to me:

Hark, hark, the dogs do bark,
The beggars are coming to town.

But the dogs have ceased barking, and the Soviet beggars have arrived.

The Bolshevik officer watched our interest in the crowds and seemed ameliorated. When I took out a cigarette he most politely offered me a match, revealing a smile which once again revived our memory of the Gleam. His face, fierce and alarming in repose, melted into friendliness. We offered him one of our

Polish biscuits, and he lent us a copy of the Minsk *Herald* or its Russian equivalent, and we settled down into a mutual affability.

We munched our rolls and nibbled our apples and wondered, among other things, why Russian babies and young children so seldom seem to cry. They are the best and least fussy travellers imaginable. The infants, bound tightly in swaddling-clothes, lie quiet as images, an expression of almost Oriental calm upon their tiny countenances. Their brothers and sisters of a bigger growth give little trouble and suffer from less parental interference. Sometimes they just sit; sometimes, to judge by appearances, they sit and think, but very rarely do they cry, and their appetite for rye bread and weak tea remains delectable. I should have preferred to be among them on the 'hard' seats. The commissar by this time was dozing, the doctor had disappeared, and the bank clerk was in a day-dream. Only the woman with the portfolio continued to be active, still poring over her work.

She read slowly and with difficulty, making careful notes all the time. Her hands were large and capable, but finely fingered. She was, I think, of peasant stock, and had acquired the arts of reading and writing with considerable pains.

You may ask why, not knowing how to speak or understand her language, I can suppose any of my conclusions to be correct. But Wyndham Lewis somewhere suggests that the evidence of the senses is more reliable than the testimony of words.

And it has been through my eyes and my emotions that I have learned many things.

The bank clerk snatched up his wallet and jumped on to the platform. The woman with the portfolio followed suit. I was moved with a like impulse.

"Let us get out too," I said to Bunny. "This station has a nice face."

There followed a long and deeply interesting discussion with the station-master. We had booked to Kiev, but we had alighted at a wayside station in White Russia hundreds of miles from our destination. We produced our passports and explained with eloquent gestures that we were going on eventually, but not to-day—the whole expanse of the wide sky testified to the indefinite length of our sojourn. A few wayfarers joined in, and a crate of ducks lustily cackled, but nothing happened. He declined from emphasis to toleration, and finally in great good humour gave us back tickets and passports and dismissed us with a smile.

We were extraordinarily lucky. Nobody ever mistrusted us or seemed to want to persecute us. They regarded us for the most part as God's fools, and let us go upon our way rejoicing.

We were obviously a long way from town or village. The railway in these regions serves whole districts miles from the line, the peasants bringing their produce in *teliegas*, which is, indeed, the only means of internal transport. This, however, we did not know, and glanced round for the dishevelled droshky. There was not one to be seen. A long track with deep wheel-

marks stretched before us, clouds of dust blew in our faces, we were pursued by flies, and only a few cottages were to be seen. We shifted our suit-cases from one hand to another.

"We must wait and see what happens," I said firmly, and seated myself on a stony patch by the wayside. "And meanwhile let us eat."

Bunny was not convinced. She felt we had been more than usually rash. Moreover, she had been 'bitten' on the train—not by flies—and the experience depressed her.

But what she went through that morning was as nothing to what, poor girl, she later had to endure!

"Have an apple?" I said, when she declined cranberry jelly, and lo and behold!—as the children say—my faith was justified: a rickety *teliega* drawn by two skinny horses clattered up to the station. Two or three passengers unearthed themselves—we never knew just where the people hid themselves about the railway depots—and got into the vehicle, and we tried to do the same. But it needs skill and practice successfully to take your seat in these unutterably springless conveyances. There are no steps, and it is too high to rise at one leap from the ground. The only method is to perch on the side and then magnificently swing your legs round and ingloriously roll over. The bottom of the cart was filled with hay and straw, on which we sat, and once the thing got going we were flung like sacks of oats from side to side in a singularly torturous method of progression. Moreover, Bunny is a bad sailor, and a lumpy Russian road

in a native cart is terribly like a rough Channel crossing.

Removed by centuries, it seemed, from motor-cars and modern thoroughfares, we hoped we should eventually get somewhere. But there was a compensating sense of beauty in the low-lying plains which, gently curving, seemed to stretch on and on for ever; vast fields of oats sighed in the wind; yellow barley seemed to hold the sunshine; acre on acre of potatoes lifted their proud green, and over all a soft melancholy, tender and haunting, lay like a caress upon the country.

We drew up with a bone-shattering jolt at a farm-yard gate. The driver collected thirty kopeks each from our outstretched handful of coins, and with the others we scrambled down.

The *teliega* moved off up a side-track, and the passengers pushed toward some buildings in the distance. An old peasant woman pointed the way and signed to us to accompany her. Should we go through the farmyard gates or take advantage of Granny's invitation? She had gathered, I suppose, that we wanted to put up for a night or two.

On the theory that in Russia what looks most difficult is always the most easy, we left the farmhouse behind and toiled along the dusty track.

And then we remembered that we had eaten all our rolls!

Chapter VI

THE OLD MOUJIK AND THE NEW

THE White Russian village, as I see it, is steeped in Tsarist decay from the feet to the waist, when it becomes suddenly active and joins up with the Soviet brain. I saw the two halves, marked the dividing-line quite clearly on that blazing afternoon. The long, straggling street, with its tumbledown dwellings, was punctuated with new up-springing buildings that shouldered out of the way the dilapidated cottages, with their collapsing roofs and walls.

The enormity of the task to which the Soviet has put its hand drove into my consciousness. For this insignificant little place is typical, not of one nor of a hundred others—as striving and as handicapped, but of a vast range of villages throughout the whole of Russia. Everywhere the decay of decomposing years, everywhere new, coursing life in a relentless surge toward the rehabilitation of huge agricultural districts. New tenements, new stores, new offices, grow and multiply: not beautiful, but planned on utilitarian lines, clean and well constructed.

Next to the post-office, square and uncompromising, a small and ancient church still held its own. The cupola, weathered by innumerable storms, reared its graceful head, symbolic of spiritual perpetuation in a world of economic flux. A little farther on was a

Soviet school. The children were already going home—more quietly, as it seemed to me, than they do in England—sturdy little youngsters, with bright eyes and intelligent faces. The kiddies do not bloom and blossom with soft complexions and curly hair, but, though small, they are well made and, generally speaking, in good health. The White Ruthenian type is not impressive; the peasants, undersized as the town folk, show in their faces something of the bleakness of the earth they till. But, tough as the soil, with the same quality of renewal, there is nothing of the city's depression in their bearing.

Our friend, a careful and phlegmatic soul—we called her Martha—took us to the Co-operative Store and began to talk to a quick-eyed, plump little woman with a twinkling smile, who obviously ran not only the store, but the entire village. She realized that we wanted a bed for the night—Russians always understand the need of sleep—and after much discussion led the way out of the store and down the street to a small and not too tumbledown place where they sold vodka and other national drinks. Beer is not a native beverage, and is brewed only in small quantities; under Government control the vodka shop seems the nearest approach to an inn that sea-green incorruptibility can tolerate. Drink is not prohibited by the State; it is discouraged. The Kremlin, daughter of the horse-leech, demands abstinence not as a discipline, but as a sacrifice. The less you drink vodka the more time, energy, and money you give to Communism, a doctrine upheld by the Young Communist

Party, who harry the countryside in their spare hours with insistent propaganda.

We were shown a room at the back where we could sleep. It wasn't clean, but it wasn't dirty. The floor was swept though unwashed, the mattress lumpy, and the clothes a little dingy at the hem. There was no other furniture and no possible accommodation for washing. Later we secured some water and an earthenware pot and performed rudimentary ablutions. The small window had neither curtain nor blind, but at least there were no insects, and, having discovered and destroyed poor Bunny's errant flea, we felt quite comfortable, though rather hungry.

From a stall, however, we were able to buy some rolls, and from a shop a bottle of a kind of mineral water made from cranberries, and with one of our boxes of sardines we made a good meal. As we ate the village people drifted in and out, studying us with the frank curiosity of children or cows, and commenting upon our manners and our customs. We felt a little like unhappy animals paraded for the public view, only we hadn't any bars, and at least the onlookers didn't jab at us with sticks and umbrellas. Presently a broad, fat old man came in, dressed like the rest in rags and with bare feet. There was something foreign in his face, smooth, round, good-tempered, with nothing of the Russian melancholy sensitiveness.

He addressed us in German at first, and then fell back on English—slow, tortuous, indescribably mangled, but English for all that. He was German

by birth, and before the Revolution had traded in groceries and married a Russian wife. She, however, was dead, and trade was prohibited, so at present he worked on a neighbouring communa. Temperamentally he was something of a vagabond, and loved to wander idly over the countryside, where, I think, he was very welcome, and as he was fat and old and genial and played the fiddle, his frequent absences from work were not too hardly dealt with.

He was a shrewd old man, who accepted the entire loss of his worldly goods and established position with a serene philosophy. Mentally he was still young and curious, and the surprises and set-backs of Soviet growth fascinated and contented him. Like most foreigners, he had absorbed the psychology of the people, their acceptance and their resilience. Russia has a deep and abiding influence over the alien and gradually engulfs him.

Hans—he was like a charcoal-burner—took us into some of the village homes; poor forlorn places, and my heart sank the first time we went into a peasant's living-room. The floor was of earth, the walls blackened with smoke, the sloping roof dingy with unexplored heights and depths of grime. It was furnished by a rickety table, two broken-down stools, an old bench, and the inevitable *polati*, a platform where the family sleep. The air was close with the smell of cabbage broth and the fumes of the stove. I had not thought to find so low a standard of existence.

"They work their own land," said Hans suddenly, motioning to the old man and his wife, seated solidly

upon a form. "Bad soil, poor soil, they labour from dawn till evening to live. . . . Also"—he saw my eyes turn to a pile of soiled linen on the floor—"soap is very scarce under the Soviet. Our Government cannot let us have all we need. It is wanted for export, to get machines and tractors."

"Why don't they join a communa?" I asked, and with the question put my finger on a tragedy integral to the U.S.S.R.

"They are too old," said Hans, "too old to change their ways. They have worked their own plot of ground since first they married, and by the sweat of their brow they tilled the land, bought a cow, and fed and clothed their children. And now the children have gone, the cow has been killed, and only the land remains."

"Why was the cow killed?" I asked. "For food?"

We had left the cottage and were walking up the street toward the tenements in process of construction.

"No." He looked at me steadily as though he were trying to size me up. "In the country," he said slowly—I give my own transcript of his words—"people grow deep into the earth; like trees, they are difficult to move. Our Government, knowing how hard it is for the individual to make a decent living, decided it would be better for all the peasants to collectivize. In the spring of 1929 they made propaganda to that effect. But the people did not like the idea. They were accustomed to their own ways. They would not budge; not only here in White Russia, but all over the U.S.S.R., it was the same."

This was a neat way of saying that the Soviet had attempted forcibly to round up the peasantry and had conspicuously failed. Individual ownership, with all it implies, was the actual pivot on which the life of the peasant revolved. He knew each inch of his land; its disadvantages and possibilities were punctuated by the labour of years. Rather than tear himself away from his patch he would die.

"So when the Government announced that all the beasts were to be driven into the communa and all the corn handed over for collective use, and that we were to work for the general profit, the people burned their corn and killed their beasts rather than submit. The woman in the cottage you thought so dirty just now slaughtered their cow herself. It was a good cow and gave much milk, and the old man could not bear to do it. But she preferred to kill. She could not let it go with all the rest. It has meant a very hard time for them ever since."

I felt a just reproof as I recalled my look at the dingy room, the unwashed linen. The cottage suddenly became the symbol of a sacred cause, the cause of hearth and home for which these brave old things were fighting.

"The widow woman who lives here," said Hans, pausing outside a tumbledown old place, "set fire to the stack of oats that was to last her through the winter. Not a house in the village that did not lose corn, or potatoes, a cow, a pig, chickens, or ducks. That," he added suddenly, "is one of the reasons why meat is so scarce. The peasants killed so many of

THE OLD MOUJIK AND THE NEW

their beasts that there were hardly any left to breed, and there will be meat shortage for years."

Against the individual peasantry, rooted in the soil, the Soviet scheme had broken. Remembering their arduous existence, the incredible tenacity necessary to wrest even a bare subsistence, this deliberate sacrifice for freedom is surely one of the finest chapters in the nation's history. All over Russia the holocaust went on. The old people fired their ricks, destroyed their cattle, and waited. Ultimately the Central Soviet accepted defeat and left the peasants, depleted but victorious, in possession of the stricken field.

But for all their heroism the old people of the countryside are fighting a losing battle. In every part of the country the young people have left the home, with its appalling drudgery, discomfort, and rigid poverty, for the communa, with up-to-date machinery, co-ordinated effort, and general amenities, only returning to the roof-tree to harry their parents into adopting communal life.

Existence for these die-hards is meagre and drab. But, as Hans explained in impeded rhetoric: "It was always so. In the old, bad days there was no chance and hardly any choice for the poor peasant. Either he worked his own land or hired himself out to work somebody else's. They were all paid a starvation wage, and nobody lifted a hand to help them. They worked like dogs before the Revolution. Their corn was bought at a cut-throat price, like their skill. After the Revolution the Kulaks tried to do the same thing."

MY RUSSIAN VENTURE

We managed with time and trouble to arrive at a fair estimate of what a Kulak really is. According to the anti-Bolshevist Press, he is an intelligent and thriving peasant whom the Soviet desires to crush; on the Soviet posters he is a man-eating ogre who deserves extermination.

The Revolution, completely wiping out the big landowners, left a residuum of trained agriculturists, factors, stewards, and the like, who in the general *mélange* acquired holdings of their own. But while the average peasant remained content to sow and plough as much land as he could contend with, the members of this more enterprising class took over larger and larger areas which could only be worked by outside assistance. And here returned the old exploitation in another form. The nobles had disappeared, the middle-class employers still remained. The Kulaks, as they were named, realized their opportunity. The rank and file of the countrymen produced little more corn than was needed for local consumption, thus leaving the needs of the cities and the increasing requirements of the army uncatered for. This gave the Kulak his market, and forthwith numbers of peasants were hired to work the land at a starvation wage, and the return from their individual crops was so meagre that they easily accepted paid employment.

The Soviet gave the Kulaks a run for their money. It was essential that the towns should be fed, though undoubtedly as a class the exploiters waxed fat and extorted the last ounce of work from the proletariat. Ill-feeling grew up against them, and as a whole the

peasantry were quite pleased when, with the inception of the Five Years Plan, their reign came to an end and the scheme for State agriculture on an industrial basis ruled the Kulak out. As an exploiter of other people's labour, his class was a menace to the Soviet, perpetuating the worst forms of sweating of the Tsarist *régime*. Moreover, had he been permitted to remain his increasing wealth and power would have proved a formidable obstacle to the force of the U.S.S.R.

I have heard it said that had the Kulaks taken warning and deliberately abrogated their capitalist position, collectivizing their land and their resources, direct action would not have been used. They were, however, persuaded that the Soviet did not mean business, and in the teeth of proclamations to the contrary continued the illegal employment of their fellows. It became a question as to whether individual exploitation was to be crushed or allowed to continue *sub rosa*.

The Soviet struck, and struck hard, and, having so decided, held no terms whatsoever with any Kulak, big or small.

"He was the oppressor, the usurer, the exploiter of the people," said Hans, "and now he has disappeared. The Soviet has wiped him out."

I found no denial or evasion of this wholesale elimination.

"Our Government has shot a million Kulaks," a Soviet official told me calmly. "Terrible?" He smiled, and shrugged his shoulders. "It is the

Revolution," he said quietly. "You cannot have revolution without shedding blood."

Once a Kulak always a Kulak in the eyes of the State, which holds no terms with the accursed tribe. A Kulak is not permitted to join a Collectivist farm. He may flee from his own district, but can find no place of repentance. Wherever he goes he can get no work, for he has no identification-card, no ration-card. To announce who and what he is would be to put the manacles on his own wrists. He cannot be employed on a State farm for the same reason. There is literally no hole in which he may hide himself. He may resign his cattle, give up his secret store of corn, all to no avail. He is an outlaw, and for him there is only the mine, the lumber camp, or afforestation, where under conditions of forced labour he may grind out a forlorn existence.

The Soviet argument is hard but unanswerable. Blood was shed to give the land to the people—the Kulak took advantage of the sacrifice of his fellows to profit from their labour, to live in comfort by the sweat of their brows. He had helped to overturn an unjust system only to become himself an oppressor.

The underlying dogma of the whole Soviet system is that the one and only employer shall be the State—and the State is the people. This does not work out toward the preservation of individual freedom. Beyond the realm of economics it cramps and cripples the development of thought, the reaching out to new ideas. But while admitting the limitations of the principle, its validity remains. "Thou shalt not

exploit thy neighbour" is the chief commandment of the U.S.S.R.

To Western ideas this proscription of some millions of people seems an outrage on justice. To deprive a class for life of civic rights and privileges, without hope of reclamation, is a violation of mercy, if not of decency. But in considering this phenomenon it should, I think, be borne in mind that wholesale shooting, deportation, and forced labour are no new things in Russia. Under the old *régime* political prisoners endured all the hardships and the horrors apportioned to the Kulak. But whereas the former were punished for sinning against the majesty of the Tsar, the Kulak is condemned for sinning against the people.

By this time we were back at the school-house. The doors were still open, but old men and women, middle-aged husbands, youngish wives, were passing through.

"They're going to evening classes," said Hans. "It has become a craze with the peasants to learn to read and write. They come to school from miles around. It's almost like a new game for them."

The summer sky was still light, and under the windows at the tables and desks the students were busily poring over the Russian equivalent for "the cat is on the mat" and more advanced exercises. A fine old creature, wrinkled with life's knowledge like a Durer woodcut, sat, primer in hand, spelling out the alphabet; a venerable patriarch twisted his mouth trying to use a pen; mothers of big families patiently read out infantile sentences!

In this land of topsy-turvy it is the parents who take their lessons to the children for help.

Hand in hand with the scheme for national housing goes the campaign for education. Hammers clatter, class-rooms buzz, books on history, peasant arts and crafts, stream from the presses. Lectures are arranged and well attended—a new and growing Russia is springing up before old eyes.

Outside the school-house the air grew suddenly chill; the wind like a bird of prey swooped from the north upon the plain and bit into our blood. We said good night to Hans and went back to sardines, rolls, a glass of vodka, and bed.

In the next few days we made the acquaintance of most of the village, and Bunny formed an attachment for Masha, a small child who devoured all our remaining chocolates with no appreciation of their worth. We made the little shop our headquarters, journeying through the interior in the inevitable *teliega* with Hans. Bumping became second nature to our bodies, and we ceased to feel the slightest qualm at the biggest rut, swallowing large gulps of dust in perfect patience. For the most part the trail of the builder is over the land, but sometimes we chanced on a village untouched by the renaissance, where a cruelly low level of life and conditions generally obtained, where the flies crawled over the babies and drowsed in the milk, hanging in thick clouds about the dust-heaps.

The contrast between the White Russian and the Polish Ruthenian standard was painfully present. The neat, pretty cottages set back behind palings, the

buxom, well-fed girls and straight-backed men are not here. But occasionally and refreshingly we found a dwelling better kept, with an air almost of homeliness—a peasant-woven shawl gay with roses hanging on the door, a home-made carpet in greens, blues, and yellows decorating the wall, the imperial countenance of Lenin, infantile or middle-aged, surrounded with the most exquisite embroideries. The daintiest stitchery is achieved by those roughened, calloused hands, those toil-worn fingers. There is a native genius for home crafts in the people which generations of slave toil has not crushed out.

I remember one afternoon Bunny discovered an ancient spinning-wheel, gracious of outline, strong as steel, weathered by innumerable years, like the hand-loom on which the men's shirts, the women's blouses, carpets, and shawls are woven. But though environment may differ, always the diet is the same—rye bread and tea, tea and rye bread, cabbage and beetroot soup. And always the countryside clothes itself in rags, except on high days and holidays, when the national costumes appear as if by magic and deck the streets until they bloom and blossom as though a field of daffodils were on the march.

Our first Sunday in Russia was high summer. We awoke early to the old familiar sounds—the crowing of the cock, the clucking of the geese, the clatter of hammers—and, remembering it was Russia, we turned over and slept again.

Now by law the Sabbath—*i.e.*, the seventh day of rest—is abolished. The month consists of six weeks of

five working days each, the theory being that various groups of State employees, or Collectivist workers, should lay off on different days so that the industrial machine may never stop. This holds good in the cities, for the rural proletariat, and on the State farms. It is quite another matter for the communes and the individual peasant. They do not break the law; they do not observe the Sabbath. It merely happens that agricultural exigencies make it easier for all to work and all to rest together.

When, therefore, we came down into the shop—the rolls were stale that morning—we found Madame our hostess had discarded her usual mud-coloured garment and was wearing a bright red bodice embroidered in green and a black shawl. Her hair was parted under a white kerchief, and the blue-striped apron was fresh and clean. She was not a communicative woman, and never responded to our pantomimic enthusiasm, but she unbent that morning and gave us a kind smile.

Outside the street was gay with colour. Young girls, home from the communes, wore bright blouses, brilliant scarves on their heads. The young men sported fine white shirts with blue and red embroideries. The old women draped themselves in shawls, green, red, blue, purple on a black ground.

These clothes, often handed down from the older to the younger generation, are the eternal symbol of the interior difference between the country and the town, individualism and standardization. These lovely garments are the banners of the soil. The peasants

render to Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's—new houses, machinery, night schools, Collectivist farms—but when it comes to the question of their own personal tastes and liberties they join together indivisible, unbreakable.

They are the rock on which Lenin built his State, they are also the rock on which Stalin all but foundered. For Russia is the peasant, and the peasant is Russia and the fulness thereof.

The little church held its morning service quite unmolested. The congregation were mostly very old and very young, grandparents and toddlers, with a sprinkling of men and women over fifty. But not a girl or youth was to be seen. It is in Russia as in England, only a small proportion of the new generation have much interest in religion—they prefer economics.

In the afternoon, following a repast of rolls—no butter, but new-laid eggs secured by Hans—we attended a wireless concert in the school-house. The programme was extremely good, and included Tschai-kovsky, Wagner, and a relay of opera from Berlin. The radio is everywhere in Russia, and is one of the most potent instruments of propaganda.

We had to pay for our music by interminable and frenzied addresses, sandwiched before and after each item, and all on the same string—"Comrades, be up and doing," "Tighten your belts," "The Soviet needs volunteers to fight capitalism." I recognized the accent, the strenuous, turgid note of the speaker's voice, the rising and almost hysterical cadence, the throat-tearing, nerve-splitting emission.

The audience remained silent for the most part. Occasionally a young Communist would harangue the crowd, quite indifferent to his rival the microphone. But these interruptions also received little response. It is, I think, the vastness of the landscape, the fresh and clean-tipped air, that keeps the peasants steady under the onslaught of Soviet sob-stuff. They learn to turn an indifferent ear to the braying of the loud-speaker, a cautious eye on the scare heads in the Press. Moreover, both the newspaper and the wireless being novel to the countryman they are less convincing in their immediate effect. The peasant is proverbially suspicious of new gadgets.

We paid a visit to the schoolmaster in the evening, enjoyed a supper of beetroot soup with sunflower seeds, and discussed economics through Hans's translation. He was a shrewd person, the schoolmaster, and quite well-read. But he could not make out, nor could anything we said assist him, where the English peasantry had gone to. He simply could not understand a country given over to the industrialists with a sprinkling of Kulaks.

The next morning Hans took us to a State farm some miles distant. Here we found no cottages, the men and women being housed in tenement flats, still in process of erection. Each family has a room or two rooms according to its size, but the accommodation is reckoned not on living but on sleeping space—so many cubic feet of air and the rest. The meals are cooked in a communal kitchen and eaten in a communal hall. The hall in this case was low-roofed

and depressing, and the farm-hands generally suggested an uninspiring standardization, the outcome of the system of wage-earning which allows no individual profit or advancement. They own nothing on these farms. Everything is the property of the Soviet, and whether the harvest be good, bad, or indifferent the earnings are the same.

This particular centre of State activity is given over to experimental work. Apples are cross-bred, new varieties of pears are tried out, larger and better plums are grown under the superintendence of agricultural experts of the type we met in Minsk. Similar experiments are taking place in regard to oats and rye. Wheat, as I have said, is not grown in these parts, as the soil is too poor. There were tractors and stables and a small model dairy, just like the stalls at the exhibition. It was all carefully taped and meticulously worked out. And then I passed the tenements, and through an open door I caught a glimpse of a tousled bed, a broken chair, and a general air of fustiness.

We went over several State farms, corn-growing reserves, beet and potatoes, pig farms, and poultry. But though I can give full credit to their agricultural methods, to me they lack the human element and the joyous comradeship in work and play that is the essence of the true farmstead. The peasants do not take kindly to these institutions, which for the most part are recruited from the surplus proletarian population of the towns.

We had plans to go farther afield and if possible

visit a Collectivist farm that day, but Hans gravely insisted that this was not possible. The *teliega* was wanted the next morning to take the peasants and their produce to the market some miles off, and if the scraggy horses were overtired that afternoon they might not be fit for the next morning, so nothing more could be done. I suggested that other horses might be obtained, and pleaded our eagerness to see the country.

But Hans was absolutely Russian in his attitude, and Bunny very basely backed him up.

It is quite futile to try and wangle your way beyond a certain point in the U.S.S.R. You may succeed part of the way, but when the Rubicon is reached wiles come to an end.

We scrambled back into the cart, and I wondered for the umpteenth time whether if ever the Soviet would arrange efficient transport. Tractors in plenty, motors there are none. They will come, say the people, with the completion of the Five Years Plan. There is another locomotion mystery which I never succeeded in solving. Who owns the *teliega* and the horses which run the service to and from the railway? And who pockets the fares, if not the profits? I could not find this out. Bunny and I, however, decided it was part of the hush-hush system which in unexpected details still persists, and that the Soviet winks at this private enterprise, preferring to suffer illegal means of transit to the trouble of organizing a legal one. Or perhaps the State levies tribute, or maybe the *teliegas* of White Russia have formed a

communa and, like the droshky-drivers, divide the profits as by law established.

"To-night," said Hans, "it will rain and rain." It did, coming down in a steady, mournful sheet, wrapping the recipient plains in a cloud of melancholy. The skyline was blotted out, and the village went indoors. We sat in the shop munching the last of our cheese. I will admit that on a day of rain the question of food becomes acute. We began to feel depressed, and anticipated a dull evening. But Russia never runs to form, and things unexpectedly cheered up. Hans arrived with Martha and Masha the small child.

A most exciting thing had happened. The previous night Martha's husband Ivan had been seen walking with a hussy from the communa—a strapping wench with black hair and a fair skin. Kind friends had warned Martha of what was in the wind, and that she might wake up to find she had no husband! For divorce, being merely a matter of registration, may fall on you unexpectedly, and Ivan might hitch up with the hussy and give his wife the go-by while she was quite unprepared. This was more than even Martha could bear, so in the early dawning she set out for the town, registered her divorce before Ivan could get there, and, returning home, told him to clear out! Things got to such a pitch that the whole neighbourhood gathered round to take a hand in the proceedings. Ivan, miserable as a whipped dog, was jeered at by his friends—no wife, no home, and, worse than all, the hussy at the farm denied all knowledge of him!

"And now," said Hans, "he begs his wife to take him back."

"And will she?"

Hans shrugged, and laughed with a sly glance at Martha's stolid features.

"Yes—and no," he answered. "She will keep him in the cold a little while, but not too long. Presently they will get married over again and settle down. It has happened that way in the village."

Meanwhile Martha, with a becoming little flush, sipped a glass of tea and gave intermittent giggles. It was, we felt, a marvellous thing at five-and-fifty to be the heroine of a romance.

"It will continue to rain," said Hans, "and Ivan will get very wet."

We discussed the situation at length until Martha and the child departed, and Hans curled up on a bench and went to sleep.

"To-morrow," I said to Bunny, "I think we must move on, otherwise we shall find ourselves rooted in village life. Already you look on Masha with devotion, Martha obviously has a mind to take us as lodgers, and Hans is on the edge of adopting us for keeps!"

But all the same we said good-bye to the shop, the school-house, and the straggling street, and shook hands with all our friends in genuine regret. We never knew what happened to Ivan. I suspect that Martha took him back, but that she makes him do the household chores for punishment!

Chapter VII

A YOUNG COUNTRY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

THE effect of the Soviet upon the younger people of the countryside is to give them a radical sense of affiliation to the State. The material sparseness does not press too heavily upon a breed inured for centuries to the utmost rigour of existence. Their meagre diet is unsoured by the acid of envy. Desire for the rich food enjoyed by more fortunate ones no longer churns the stomach. If A goes hungry B also is denied, for what is meat for Jack is meat also for Jack's Soviet master. This impulse of equality has invigorated their outlook. To them the Soviet is a personal and acute possession. They regard themselves as actual particles of a living organism which embraces the whole of the country.

It is impossible to remain immune from the effect of this inspiring influence. In the cities my mind and my emotion were always dragged down by the sense of hopelessness, the remembrance of decay among the older people. But I felt the wind of the spirit blowing on the face of the fields, cleansing the old plague-spots of enslavement, injustice, oppression, and misery. The air teems with effort; the people, body and soul, are alive to the issues at stake—the future not of Ivan or of Masha, not of White Russia or of Georgia, but of the Soviet whole.

When the *teliega* bumped and bucketed we longed sadly for more modern means of locomotion. But at the same time it was heartening to think that while, like us, the peasants are sorely shaken, no one, except officials on State business, rides more comfortably, and if personal well-being and convenience are of naught, the economic sustenance of every citizen is assured.

It gave me a curious sense of elation—and of regret—when I remembered that of all the vast millions of Russia no one is unemployed. . . .

Along this track, over endless wastes of sand and marshy patches, past small plots and spreading acres, the stupendous economic venture of the U.S.S.R. seemed at moments overpowering. The *teliega* stopped at the gates of a communa, familiarly known to the neighbourhood as the Little Farm. A wide and decently kept road led to a low wooden building, rather like the customs house on the frontier at Negoreloje. The door stood open, showing an office complete with deal table, shelves, and posters, and the arrangement of wooden balls strung on wires—*shchetah*—by which Russia still does her accountancy. A bearded little man greeted us, read the note we had brought from Hans, and, we gathered, proceeded to communicate to all and sundry that two foreigners had arrived. He was, at any rate, immediately joined by his wife, a typical White Russian, short and sturdy, with a weather-beaten skin and kind eyes, who had three children clinging to her skirts and a girl of about fourteen lagging behind. It being useless to proceed by question, we pointed to the fields and hayricks in

the distance. The manager gathered what we meant and led the way outside, his wife and family following.

This was a fruit and vegetable farm, and we duly admired the neatly kept orchards and the flourishing condition of the trees, due, presumably, to the agricultural experts appointed to each district to superintend grafting and other operations. Huge tracts of beet and potatoes, field cucumbers and tomatoes, occupied the 450 souls centred on the communa, with another and most unexpected activity—a stud farm. They breed magnificent horses in Russia, and the high-spirited thoroughbreds, soft-eyed and satin-skinned, had each its name, age, and complete pedigree over its stall. The lovely creatures, stepping delicately, were led out on parade by young lads, who handled them with expert skill. A white stallion, haughty and contemptuous, had been sired by an English thoroughbred—horses and hogs from the British Isles distribute their strain throughout the Soviet.

The workers of the communa, with their families, live in neighbouring cottages, but plans are on foot for the construction of tenements which will accommodate them all. Meals, however, are eaten in the farmhouse, and, it being a hot day, the tables were spread in the courtyard, with spoons and bowls which presently were filled with cabbage soup, potatoes, and chunks of rye bread. The children flew to their food like a flock of pigeons, and sat down with their parents or at small tables by themselves. Some of them could do little more than toddle; others, slightly older, took a serious part in the work of the farm, polishing

apples and stacking them on shelves ready for packing and export. We discovered a group of kiddies between six and seven eagerly watching the overhauling of a tractor. The hunger for machinery, the belief in its cure for economic ills, has spread to the smallest urchin, boy or girl. Dolls are at a discount, books of no regard, but toy engineering is dear to every tiny heart.

The school age in Russia begins at nine and ends at fourteen, when the young people go on to the high school or polytechnic or university. In the capital cities there are kindergarten and day nurseries for those under school age. But these have not yet reached White Russia. In the south arrangements are made for the communal care of children at the farms where their parents work, but as yet this particular republic is behind the times.

The general rooms looked rather bleak, with only chairs and tables, while the countenance of Lenin alone relieved the bareness of the walls. Books there were none, but the presence of a blackboard and easel in the office, with a series of maps, showed that here as elsewhere the people were eager to learn.

Bunny fell in love with a small boy who trustingly confided to her care a blunt pocket-knife while he devoured an apple. He was a very bright child, and understood exactly what Bunny wanted to know when she pointed to the fruit inquiringly and said, "Apple?"

"*Yabwoko*," he answered, gurgling.

"Thank you," she replied, to which the little one burst into peals of merriment.

The small boy was typical of the general air of well-

A YOUNG COUNTRY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

being that characterized the place. Here, at last, we had seen a communa at work, had tested the main-spring of the movement that has spread all over Russia. The workers threw themselves into the enterprise with pride and energy. We found nothing of the wage-earning attitude in their demeanour. We felt that they were free men working on free land.

The Collectivist farms in White Russia, as all over the U.S.S.R., are run by the manager elected directly by the workers from among their number. He is responsible in every case for the development of the land, for the appointment of each man's job, and his authority, under an elected committee, is absolute. His term of office expires at the end of twelve months, when maybe he is re-elected. If another candidate should win more votes, however, he simply steps back into the rank and file.

While the Government is the sole buyer of the corn and other crops, the Soviet does not in any way interfere with the local direction and management. The fact that the better the harvest the greater the chance of an increased dividend on the shares inspires the whole community to unflagging effort.

We said good-bye with an interchange of friendliness on both sides, bearing gifts of apples and plums. The people waved to us along the track till we lost sight of them, the *teliega* staggering at an amazing rate to the belated cottage where Hans had suggested we might find a lodging for the night.

It was a simple, indeed primitive, place. The family slept in one room; we were given a bed in

the other. The blankets were coarse, and the mattress—alas, poor Bunny—was a little lively! We managed to get some sleep, however, and in the morning the woman of the house gave us hot rolls and a glass of milk, a marvellous change from the inevitable tea.

From there we continued our pilgrimage, stopping how and when we could find accommodation, jolting for miles in the ubiquitous *teliega*. The habit of the country fell upon us. We made no plans. We did not even try to book a bed for the morrow. We just went on, and inevitably we found a roof to cover us, a welcome for the body as for the soul. We had only to look entirely ineffective and wistful for some one to come along and shepherd us. The Russians regarded us as innocents who must of necessity be cherished.

Sometimes we were well- sometimes ill-lodged—rarely, if ever, was there any proper sanitary accommodation, and washing arrangements for the most part were rudimentary. But side by side with these primitive conditions was a vigorous resurgence—new buildings and better houses, and fresh life pushing through decay. It was even possible to visualize a complete system of main drainage! Always we found friendliness and hospitality, and as day followed day we grew to understand a few simple words, and life became more absorbing. We felt we were present at the first beginnings of a new nation pledged to a great destiny.

We liked best the smaller farms, with their suggestion of a family tie, which, loose enough for personal freedom, is strong enough for mutual support. But

the larger comunas, with a vast acreage of barley, oats, and rye, are in another way impressive. In them you feel the genesis of that town-*cum*-country ideal which the fervent plan to discover in the garden cities scattered about London suburbs. The latter, however, are merely congeries of middle-class, professional, and distributist people. The producer is quite unknown in the polite villas of Welwyn or Golders Green. In Russia the whole outlook is different. The producer is pre-eminent. The urban atmosphere is reflected only in the mental and emotional attractions of wireless, adult classes in languages and literature, perpetual addresses on the blessings of Bolshevism, the danger of Capitalism, and the progress of Communism in the outside world. These big comunas are a touch too institutional for my taste, though the principle of co-operation keeps them free from the standardized regimentation of the State settlement.

Efficiently run for the most part—marvellously so, when we remember the primitive and picturesque methods in general use up to a few years ago—we found that modern machinery at most of the farms was regarded with an almost religious reverence. Sometimes, however, reverence seemed to exceed capacity, and we discovered neglected or disrupted tractors parked in outhouses, milk-separators left to grow rusty in a corner of a dairy where flies swarmed in the uncovered pans of milk. The social pace in these cases had been too swift; the peasants seemed to be falling back into old-fashioned ways.

It is never safe to generalize in the U.S.S.R.,

however, and we met the rebutting influence to this backsliding in full swing at the little town of M——.

We arrived one evening about six, and, having paid off the *teliega*, found ourselves enmeshed in a crowd all moving in the same direction. We joined the throng and arrived at last in a big building which, under the old *régime*, must, I suppose, have been the Town Hall. The place was packed; a band was playing the *Internationale*; small girls in red sashes sat on the platform, and small boys, standing at attention, tried to look like Soviet scouts. It was a mass meeting of the Young Communist Party, and a more powerful outpouring of the spirit I have never witnessed. The first speaker, a closely shingled girl with dark, passionate eyes, spoke for a quarter of an hour. She was, we gathered, calling on her comrades to testify their loyalty to the Soviet by offerings of labour or money. She was an ecstatic, working, I should say, twenty hours out of the twenty-four under the stimulant of sacrifice.

The effect she created was electric. The whole crowd was moved by a fervour that communicated itself like a magnetic thrill. The melancholy faces, the dull skins, the unstirred eyes, were lit as by an inner flame. As one man they leapt to their feet, breaking into salvos of applause. The band crashed out some chords, the children sang, a thin-faced boy of Jewish origin took the floor. In a low, quiet voice he told the tale, gradually working up the tension. They were typical, these missionaries; belonging to the people, believing in the Soviet way of salvation, they

A YOUNG COUNTRY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

were prepared to hunger and thirst, to go barefoot, to offer their flesh on a cross of nails in the great cause.

The boy was followed by a fair-haired young thing who seemed to rely largely on facts and figures. There is no mistaking the effect of statistics on an audience, however keen, and the inevitable shuffling of feet and hacking coughs ensued. A wiry little peasant wound up the proceedings. He had a humorous face and twinkling eyes, and the people cheered him loudly. As the audience went out they filed past the platform, on which they dropped coins, with an occasional rouble note, or handed up promises to work, to lecture, in some manner to help the Young Communist Party. And in the end the missionaries departed, carrying their sheaves of promises, their bags of kopeks, their rare and precious notes. In a country where subsistence is reduced to its simplest level the offering of a rouble has more significance than a three-figure cheque in other parts of the world.

We had evidently struck a propaganda week. Loud-speakers in the market-place blared forth the Kremlin messages. Bolshevist bands paraded the street. The emotional tensiety was stretched almost to breaking-point. This extreme pressure of activity must, I felt, have been due to a delay in the delivery of food-supplies, for all the next day long queues waited in vain outside the Co-operative Stores. There was practically nothing to eat in the public restaurants, and at the Soviet lodging-house where we found a bed it was the same story. Meanwhile empty stomachs were stayed by fiery eloquence and martial strains.

How could a good citizen stimulated by propaganda complain that rations were held up?

We managed to get a few brown rolls, some pears, and tomatoes in the open market, but eggs were at a premium. The stalls, surrounded by desirous but depressed customers, with purses, like our own, half filled, were presided over by those dogged peasants who still kept up the struggle to earn their bread by working their own plots.

Here again we found the same depressed figures and spiritless faces that we had met in Minsk. Hangdog-looking men trailed from the side-streets and, converging to the stalls, waited their opportunity to barter. There was something peculiarly forlorn in their attitude. It was as if they had no claim to be upon the earth, as though, socially speaking, they had no existence. And in the eyes of the Soviet they have no claim. These unfortunates are the disfranchised who, for some offence against the State, have been deprived of civic rights for one, two, or three years, which means that they are debarred from work—no Union would admit them—that they have no food-tickets, no living space, and, for all the State cares, may die or rot for lack of sustenance or shelter.

This is the law, but the inevitable chink in the Soviet armour here again appears. There is the open market; there are relatives and friends and family roof-trees, which, in effect, means that though the disfranchised suffer they do not starve from inanition, and they may, moreover, find odd jobs as cobblers, tailors, or domestic helps—*sub rosa*. We did not know.

this at the moment, and it was really hurtful to see the proscribed scuttling like rabbits looking for a hole.

I remember at one communa two hangdog individuals were pointed out to us as the 'bad-hats' of the neighbourhood whom the Soviet had justly punished.

"What have they done?" we asked breathlessly, expecting to hear of child murder, rapine, or arson.

"They kept a village store," was the reply, "and sold sugar, tea, and bread for private profit!"

This awful crime had been punished by two years' disfranchisement. But in Russia expiation wipes out offence—save in the case of the Kulak—and the bad men had been admitted as working shareholders on a Collectivist farm. They are now good citizens!

M—— has little to recommend it from an architectural point of view. The streets seemed more than usually squalid, and building activities had not so strong a hold here as elsewhere. But in this particularly meagre place it fell to our lot to witness an amazing spectacle. The day had dawned in incomparable sunshine, which by noon was overcome by heavy clouds. Gradually it became dark and darker; the heavens, black as pitch, were suddenly cleft by a sabre-stroke of lightning. Close on the artillery thunder peal—one and one only—came the sound of drums, the piercing note of bugles, the measured tread of armed men. Involuntarily the people paused, lining up on the kerb. All eyes were turned to the top of the street with its slight declivity. Down the hill marched a company of Bolshevik soldiers, followed by a band, preceding a huge catafalque with

a purple pall, heavily fringed. The outlines of the coffin were visible, and the dead man's rifle lay at his feet. It was a soldier's funeral. He was to be buried with full military honours. No religious service would be said, but there remained the open hearse, the horses with their flowing manes, all the pomp and panoply of conventional obsequies.

And then, under the thunderous sky from which the rain was beginning to fall, in full view of the procession, a woman knelt upon the path and, crossing herself, began to pray. The crowd surged, the soldiers tramped, the hearse swayed over the uneven road, but motionless, unheeding, she knelt, while the rain soaked her ragged garments. A photographer snapped the *cortège*—symbolic picture of to-day and yesterday.

We were troubled very little by formalities during our journeyings. Ogpu remained hidden, and commissars were not to be seen. We handed over our passports to the booking-clerk at the hotels and lodging-houses where we stayed, and exhibited them to all and sundry in the villages. Further than this nothing was asked or expected from us. But though we had practised rigid economy, by this time our funds were almost halved. White Russia had been a marvellous adventure, and we had experienced and appreciated its indigence, industry, and idealism to the full. We wanted, however, to see a more prosperous part of the U.S.S.R., to experience the softer climate, the more refulgent vegetation, of the south, with its noble architecture, its deep-seated culture, and its ingrained sense of colour and of form.

We decided to start for the Ukraine, making Kiev our headquarters. The oldest and loveliest of the Russian cities, I had a romantic longing for the ancient home of St Sofia, most magnificent of cathedrals. I wanted to see what had happened to the sacramental plate, heavily inlaid with precious stones; if Bolshevism had left untouched the monastery of the Lavro, with its irreplaceable manuscripts, its rare gardens, flowers, shrubs, and exotic trees.

"Let us start to-morrow," I said to Bunny, and, she agreeing, once more we packed our exhibition jam and jelly—minus a pot by this time—the tiny spirit stove, and the little kettle! We had broken one of our travelling tumblers, however, so we bought another from a public restaurant, thick, heavy, and serviceable. It still remains with us!

Barter was quite easy. Bunny took the glass, I held out the money—fifty kopeks settled the deal.

We took a tram to the station, there to await what God or the Russian railways would send us. We did not plan to go by any special train—anyway, that would have been quite futile!—but set out on chance, prepared, if necessary, to wait and sleep for hours. By this time we had acquired the habit of relaxing into slumber in true Russian style, and were ready to spend a whole day drowsing in native fashion on the platform. But luck was in our favour, and we arrived in time for the Kiev express, which was only two hours late!

We seized our luggage and, squeaking "Kiev," ran along the platform, to be finally waved into soft seats.

We were informed—it was astonishing how we learned to extract the important facts from an ocean of unintelligible words—that we should have to change at Bachmatsz, where if we wanted soft seats we must re-book for Kiev. Our carriage this time was empty, and Bunny thankfully curled up in a corner for a doze. We had not been happy in the matter of beds the previous night. The mattresses smelt musty, and the blankets were not overclean.

“Do you think”—Bunny sat up suddenly—“do you think it will be possible to get a bath at Kiev? It seems like ages and ages since we had one, and I am getting sick and tired of washing in penny numbers and cold water.”

Secretly I felt convinced that Kiev would be furnished with every kind of bathing appliance, from shower facilities to luxurious depths of soft water, really and truly hot. I did not encourage her hopes, however, which, as events proved, was a wise decision.

The low plains of White Russia changed under our eyes to the vast expanse of the steppes which, within a stone's throw of time luxurious only with weeds, now bloomed with wheat, ripe and glowing under a brilliant sky. The air grew warmer, the sun more powerful, the carriage unbearably stuffy. As we moved farther south the physique of the people, like the outlines of the country, visibly changed. The men, taller, broad-chested, with white teeth and smooth brown skins, moved with a vigorous swinging vitality. When the train stopped the on-getting army of peasants swooped like a charge of cavalry upon the carriages.

The metal teapots flashed like swords, the rye loaves were banners. 'Crash and crash came the bare feet of the strong men, the sturdy women. The girls, their heavy hair cropped close, held their heads high, their insteps were arched, their figures curved and flexible. Life pulsed at high pressure. We felt an amazing variation in the human barometer.

We were very hungry on that journey. For the first time we did not fancy our rolls bare, so to speak—we had not the energy to unpack the jam, and we were tired of apples. We hopped out at a stopping-place and bought a bottle of the cranberry drink we had discovered at Minsk, and looked wildly round for eggs. But there was nothing doing, and, feeling really faint, *faute de mieux* we had to munch our rye bread with what zest we could summon.

We rolled on through wooded hill-sides, skirting vast forests, mere islets in an ocean of land. The immensity of Russian mileage, the overpowering vastness of her territory, seemed to gather in volume as we travelled. The realization of a power latent in her material wealth, coupled with her productive energy, was almost overwhelming.

It was dark when we reached Bachmatsz. The earth felt hot to our feet, and as we trooped out of the train the odour of close-packed humanity was very heavy. Rather dizzy, we groped our way over the lines into the station, very large and holding hundreds of people. To me that night was a fantasy. I looked over a sea of faces, an ocean of rags, and in a sudden irritation of desire I could have screamed for a brightening

touch, a gleam of colour. Bunny was now wrestling with a collector who wanted to keep our tickets, and I pushed forward into the buffet, crammed so tight with humanity and knobbly-shaped bundles that it needed considerable will-power to force a way through.

It was a queer scene, full of lights and shadows and strange Rembrandtesque effects. The place was fitted with long tables and forms at which peasants and workmen sat and sprawled, their children and their womenfolk, the less fortunate ones, crowding up behind. Some of them kept fairly upright, though nodding with fatigue, others drooped forward, leaning their heads upon their crossed arms. It was eerily quiet, all those hundreds silent, drowsing, until a fresh entry set their bodies moving, their tongues clacking, as a breeze rustles a field of corn.

"We've got to book soft seats from here," said Bunny. "Our tickets only give us hard ones. But I can't understand when the train starts. I've tried to make the clerk tell us how long we've got to wait by pointing to the hands of my watch, but the man's either stupid or obstinate, or perhaps he thinks I'm congratulating him on the punctuality of his railway system. He only says, '*Saychass*.'"

"We can't do anything," I answered, "and we shall be as well off here for the night as anywhere else. We'd better make up our minds to stay put."

I had settled myself on a chair and removed my coat and hat.

"If," I said ingratiatingly, "one could have a cup of tea——"

"But suppose the train comes and goes without our knowing?" queried the poor child wearily.

"That's impossible really," I answered glibly. "They always ring the silly little bell before the train starts. When we hear it we can rush."

Bunny had no faith in my conclusions, but we were both too tired to argue further, and with heavenly self-denial she flung herself into the *mélée* and set about getting the tea, while I took stock of the surroundings.

I dream sometimes of that great buffet, with its cavernous corners and dim lights. Packed on top of one another, the tide of human beings literally lapped at my feet. Now and again I caught a glimpse of a face emerging from the flood—a fair-haired student, a big-boned peasant in a blue shirt, a mother with a baby, a small child with a granny. But not a touch of gaiety, a flash of laughter, lightened the heavy air.

Bunny had joined the tea queue—I had a sudden irritation at Russia's innumerable queues—and was slowly moving up toward the counter. I knew she would return with what she wanted. She has the power of pressing her requirements through the appeal of her soft blue eyes. But what she had not reckoned with was the matter of change. Small coins are at a premium in the U.S.S.R. You simply cannot get large currency split up, except at the bank.

At the last moment she realized this deficiency, and, forfeiting her place in the line, charged back to the station-master, who handed out kopeks for a rouble note without a murmur.

I lost sight of her a moment later; my eyes were

fixed on a point of light that quivered from an adjoining table. I peered forward, and gradually distinguished the outline of a lovely thing in silver—a candelabrum, exquisitely shaped and chastely wrought, on which the gaslight loved to linger. It must at one time have graced a palace, and even its present surroundings could not wholly dim a ghostlike radiance of the past. And as I watched the table with its thick china, its soiled surface, the heavy figures, the sleeping peasant faces, gave way to a sudden vision of a spacious room opening on a terraced garden. . . .

And then I heard the clear, cool voice of Bunny demanding *dwa che* in phonetic requisition of two teas, which presently she brought.

“It’s worse than a football match to try and get near the buffet,” she remarked.

I made room for her on my chair, and, infinitely grateful for small mercies, we sipped our *che*, nibbled our rolls, and felt much better.

By this time I was convinced that all traffic was held up till the morning. I did not discourage my friend, however, so she squirmed her way back to the station-master and orated with renewed eloquence. He heard, apparently comprehended—but Bunny was *saychassed* once more.

I resolved to do nothing for at least an hour, and communicated my decision so firmly that the people nearest heard us speak and faced round in curious astonishment. A peasant of about fifty, with a long moustache and quizzical eyebrows, noted the Warsaw labels on our suit-cases. The Roman lettering to one

accustomed to the Russian form appeared lunatic. He quite obviously thought there was something very queer about us. I met his eye, pointed to the label, and translated.

"Warsawa," I said.

"Ah-ha." He grew quite joyous. "*Polska?*" he queried, motioning to us both.

"*Nie.*" I felt quite fluent. "*Englieski.*"

He looked delighted. "London?" he said triumphantly.

"*Da, da,*" we cried, and in sheer delight I offered him a cigarette, for which he supplied a match, lighting mine before his own.

We grew quite conversational over our travels, mentioning the name of every Russian place we could remember. In his mind's eye he went with us from town to town, and, hugely pleased, recounted the story to his neighbours, introducing us to their attention. A boy with dark eyes, a pitifully thin neck, and a consumptive cough came close to me, and, taking my coat-sleeve between his finger and thumb, felt it carefully as women feel the quality of cloth. There was nothing the least intrusive in the action. It was done simply, gently, like a child.

"*Dobre,*" he said pathetically. "*Dobre.*" He meant that the cloth was good. And then softly but persistently he took my hand and made me feel his threadbare coat. He shook his head. "*Nie dobre,*" he said, and seemed to ask why he and others like him should wear shoddy clothes while we appeared in honest fabric. I looked my sympathy and shook his hand.

He would, I think, have tried to extricate the puzzle, but at that moment the bell rang, and he and the older peasant, grasping their loaves and bundles, pushed their way out on to the platform, firmly shaking their heads when we queried "Kiev?"

As they did not return we judged that they had found their train, and wished we had the same good fortune.

As time went on other bells rang out other passengers, but still the waiting crowd did not seem perceptibly to lessen, and we sat on, gradually growing slumberous, not to say comatose, until a young woman from behind the buffet advanced into the room, clapped her hands, and broke into a tirade. She was quite obviously not a missionary, she was not calling the passengers to the Soviet god, but to repentance. A little body—any of the men could have taken her in one hand and broken her against his knee—she had a tigerish temper, and, pouncing on a wretched peasant contentedly snoring, shook him to an upright position. She spoke to the large men as though they were small children, pointing her finger in reproof, clapping her hands in derision, until one by one the heavy heads were raised from the tables and every one sat back.

"It's the livestock she's worrying about, I expect," said Bunny, when I complained at this shrewish interference. "After all, it's not quite pleasant to have crawlers on the food."

The reform lasted at least a quarter of an hour, when the heads began to droop again, and would have fallen *en bloc* upon the tables but for a fresh diversion.

A peasant began volubly to shout, pointing dramatically to a side-exit from the buffet. Friends and relations crowded round, and we gathered that some one had made off with a piece of his property. Quite quietly—in the same casual, almost disinterested manner of our own police—the military guardians of the law appeared from all sides. The peasant explained his grievance, and there followed an exciting search. The suspect got away, however, and the peasant was left with the commiseration of his friends. There was no heckling, no truculence. The whole scene might have taken place in any European city.

The interlude closed, and we decided that we must definitely get a move on.

“If the station-master will not come to us we must go to him,” I said. “We must somehow run the Kiev express and our soft seats to earth.”

We picked up our suit-cases and trailed to the station-master’s office. The door was locked, and, unable to attract any reply, we sat down on our luggage immediately outside the door, for all the world like two poor refugees. To the left lay the great buffet, to the right the platform, dark and deserted, with the glimmer of the steel rails beyond just visible in the soft night.

And here he found us some time later. We heard a laugh, looked round, and the commissar signed to us to come in.

“Where was the Kiev train?” Business with tickets.

The commissar shrugged his shoulders, stared at the ceiling, and shook his head.

"When would it arrive?" Appropriate gestures with watch.

He looked sorrowful, and then, dashing to the telephone, rang up innumerable stations in search of the missing express.

Nobody knew where it was. No one had seen it or heard of it. The train seemed to have disappeared as suddenly as snow before spring sunshine. No train that night!

But investigations were not yet exhausted. The commissar handed over to a military policeman, who brought in a small boy who had 'lost' himself. He was put to sleep in a corner of the office, while the M.P. took the matter of our train in hand and rang up all over again.

He was, the commissar explained with eloquent gestures, next door to an Englishman, or words to that effect. "*Englieska*," he introduced us to each other, and waited eagerly for us to open conversation. Alas, the only English word the policeman had was *Kamerad*, which he repeated many times, growing louder and more emphatic with each repetition.

He was short and tubby, and the commissar was long and lean, and they both listened and frowned and grew red and excited at our failure to understand our native tongue.

We became quite friendly, however, in spite of the linguistic hiatus. Our *Kamerad* came up to scratch at the finish, and, touching my watch, pointed the hour of four, at which, we gathered, the express would stagger in!

That settled matters, for me at any rate. I arranged my suit-case as a pillow, composed myself upon a bench for the intervening hours, and urged Bunny to do likewise. Barely had we settled down when a bell rang loud and furiously, a train clattered into the station with immense fuss, and the station-master shouted, "Kiev! Kiev!" Incredible but true, the express in sheer light-heartedness had arrived.

Once again we should pass a night without much chance of sleep, but the thought of Kiev and the luxurious beds that surely awaited us spurred us on. We snatched up our baggage and followed the commissar.

Chapter VIII

THE PERIL OF SOFT SEATS

Now the doctrine of absolute equality—shades of soft seats—prevents man from affronting woman by carrying her luggage! Wherefore the commissar strode before and we followed, stumbling, after. At least I stumbled, Bunny keeping level with the conquering male. It was so dark that I could not see the rails at close quarters, and short-sightedly peered at every step. It was not, however, lack of vision that was responsible for my sudden collapse. I certainly did catch my heel on a sleeper, but I righted myself so quickly that nothing untoward need have occurred. But—I admit it—malice prepense made me sink untruthfully to the ground, my suit-case falling a few feet distant. I did not want to carry it. I did not see why I should while a large man remained unencumbered. Reacting to suggestion and our agitated flutterings, the commissar promptly picked me up with one hand and took the case in the other, Bunny murmuring savagely, “You would get what you wanted. I knew you didn’t mean to carry it!”

From then on the commissar was like a lamb. He put us into the train, arranged our soft seats with the conductor, and, murmuring the magic word “*Kamerad*,” disappeared into the night.

I shall never forget that train! Packed tight

beyond all possibility of packing, the crowds overflowed from hard and soft seats alike and spread over the corridors, sitting, lying, curled up in impossibly small spaces, sleeping for dear life.

We tramped after the conductor over the prostrate forms, and at long last found ourselves in a carriage blazing with light, from which the slightest breath of air had been excluded. The windows were tightly shut, the blinds closely drawn, the atmosphere asphyxiating to a nauseous degree. Nor was this all. Four men had already turned in—two in the lower seats and two in the upper bunks; sleepers in Russia have no pretence to sheets or blankets, just the padded cushions pure and simple—though not, indeed, quite pure!

The conductor, we gathered, asked for the billets, and three of the men with only ordinary tickets trailed out and joined the scrum. They were all peasants of the south, splendid fellows in embroidered shirts and jackets and huge boots, like their companion, who, having shown his right to be there, had relapsed again into heavy snores.

Bunny settled herself in the seat beneath his bunk, while I took the one opposite.

"But," I said, "we must have air. I shall die of suffocation," and I pointed wildly to the window, striving in vain to grapple with it, and finally seizing on the conductor. But he was adamant, and shook his head. "*Nie, nie,*" he said, and I gathered that for some occult reason air was forbidden, and that we were doomed to a Black Hole of Calcutta for the night.

Later we discovered why the windows could not be opened. They never are at night. Thieves, we were told, come to the stations with long poles, like fishing-rods, which they use to hook out passengers' property while they sleep. Hence not the least chink of window-space must be available. I never saw human creatures cling so tightly to the fear of losing personal property as night travellers in this communal land!

"But at least," I said plaintively, "we can turn out the light." It seemed to me far easier to put up with airlessness in the dark than in a brilliant blaze, and I got my way. The conductor switched off, and left us to settle down to the nearest approach to a night in hell that I have ever chanced upon.

I made up my mind to ignore the suffocating closeness; I drew shutters over my mind and thought of ice-fountains tinkling in the moonshine, frosty flowers in moss-cool glades, ripples of running water, breezes touched with the salt of the sea.

And then there fell upon my neck, with a distinct plop, something—something that moved! I dared not cry out. Poor Bunny is a mark for insects, they seek her within a radius of miles, and I feared the brute might be disturbed into leaving me for her. I need not have worried. Barely had I deposited the carcass on the floor when another plop descended.

A still, small voice came from across the floor.

"Have you felt anything, dear?" said Bunny.

"Many things," I answered bitterly.

"So have I," she said. "But it's no good getting worried, and perhaps after all it's only our nerves."

THE PERIL OF SOFT SEATS

Nerves, however, do not bite or crawl, and it was quite evident to both of us that a plague of Egypt had descended. I wrapped my head and face and neck in my woolly cardigan, buried my body in my coat, and prayed for the oblivion of nightmare, if not calm sleep!

After a while the plague ceased so far as I was concerned. I did not know till later what had happened, and at the moment I was too dog-tired to bother. I even dozed for a few minutes, and dreamt that I was in a mine with twenty tons of coal upon my head, until a soft rustling, a sound of steady friction, told me that the plague had left me for Bunny—the poor child was one vast scratch.

We could not move—there was nowhere to move to. There was not a spare inch in the corridor, and the hard seats in the carriages beyond held layers and layers of men, women, and children, their bags, vegetables, and poultry, while fear of what we might find, also consideration for the sleeping peasant, kept us from turning on the light and peppering the enemy with flit. When at last the first faint beams of early dawning stole through the muffled windows I felt as though I had emerged from a rotting tomb.

There was movement in the train, people shook themselves awake and gradually unpacked their bodies, and when I opened the door I found the passage comparatively clear. I rushed to the nearest window, which, after the Russian manner, proved unexpectedly pliable, coming down quite easily, and took in draughts of the softest, most invigorating air.

It blew away the fumes of the night watches and filled me with strength. It was useless to hope for a wash and brush-up—such luxuries are unknown to Russian travelling—but I executed what repairs I could with a comb and powder-puff and, feeling considerably better, welcomed Bunny, newly emerged, with a bright smile, which slowly faded to a horrified dismay. In mute suffering she extended her arm: her small protesting hands, her wrists, even her elbows, were a mass of horrible red swellings. Her legs were smarting, her face covered with stings. In the course of that nightmare of a journey she received, and with insistent melancholy we counted, 183 bites!

The attraction of Bunny had left me comparatively immune, and though I felt terribly mean, I was really thankful that she and not I had been the sacrifice. I promised her every kind of medicament when we got to the hotel, and meanwhile besought her to try and forget things temporal in the beauties eternal opening up before us.

She was, however, just a little bitter!

I can never hope for such an impact of loveliness as the first sight of Kiev gave to me. The dawn, rapidly ripening, poured silver on the waters of the Dnieper, till the river was a sheet of molten light. Deep-bosomed hills, rounded promontories, rose on either side, leafy with young trees, green with close-growing vegetation, and here and there uprising feathery shrubs. Long lines of slim wharves graciously framed the picture. Tall factory chimneys, impossibly beautiful golden domes, sparkling cupolas,

THE PERIL OF SOFT SEATS

reared against a virgin sky whose tender pink and white the sun was swiftly mounting. A young wind, luscious with distant corn-fields, drove small fishing-boats toward the shore, churning the miniature waves to mimic wrath. A rich warmth, full of good odours, came from the earth, bringing a sudden sense of life, full and deep-growing.

Kiev! Endowed with prodigal gifts of native comeliness, enjewelled by art and worship, serene in the beauty of a thousand years, she is new-born each morning!

It was five o'clock by the time we steamed in, to find the station thick with overnight humanity. The streets, however, were deserted, and only a single droshky drowsed upon the stand. We did not know where we were going, but we put our baggage in the horrible old vehicle, musty and tumbledown as its brother of Minsk, and looked inquiringly at the driver.

"Continental," he said, clearly and distinctly—the Russian ear for sound is miraculous—and Continental we let it be.

The city of Kiev is hilly, the roads steep, and at moments we and the vehicle seemed almost perpendicular. It was incredible that we should arrive at our journey's end alive, but we held on with prehensile tenacity, and eagerly took in the magnificent buildings, mongrel-looking stores, and gorgeous churches. After twenty minutes' drive we stopped at an imposing edifice, with the name Continental in Latin lettering spread over the face.

That drive cost us twelve roubles—thirty shillings—and, fearing the hotel tariff would be equally high, we rang the bell with considerable trepidation.

A large hall, well-carpeted, properly furnished—it was like being at home again. The porter turned us over to a booking-clerk, who wrote down the charge for a double room—seventeen roubles. We shrank back aghast—two guineas a night without a scrap of food!

I shook my head, protesting, but Bunny was more practical. She wrote down the figure eight. The clerk displayed a shocked incredulity and retorted with fifteen, to which Bunny replied with thirteen, which finally settled the dispute.

Up a long staircase, across a landing, down a huge corridor, carpeted and curtained, to No. 22, one of the largest sleeping-rooms that I have ever seen. Rent in Russia is calculated in cubic feet of space; most of the rooms at the Continental are Gargantuan, and when we arrived all the smaller ones were let. The room was well furnished in a heterogeneous fashion, the carpet a pale fawn with conventional rosebuds, the curtains a heavy velvet to match. A large writing-table, a comfortable couch, two huge arm-chairs, small chairs, and a big wardrobe completed the inventory, with one very narrow single bed. This was, however, remedied by the hall porter, who appeared with an even smaller camp-bed, which he proceeded to make up. Never in any circumstances are two beds made ready in the same room. Always the second must be asked for.

We had been travelling for so many hours that we were too tired even to wash, and, regardless of hunger and bites, conscious only of a vast desire for sleep, we tumbled in.

But if we ignored the fruits of our travelling overnight, or rather in the early morning, we had to face the full consequences at midday. Poor Bunny was a wreck. The beasts of prey must have dropped off the peasant in crowds, and had literally devoured her. Listerine, peroxide boracic acid, lint with cotton-wool, thank Heaven, were to hand. But the trouble once again was hot water. The inevitable basin and taps concealed behind a screen bore the labels "Hot" and "Cold," but they both ran cold! There was nothing to do but light up the little spirit kettle, but as the midget held barely a pint it was quite two hours before profuse fomentations and repeated dressings reduced the inflammation and the pain to bearing-point.

This, however, was not all. A cataclysm followed which reduced Bunny to the verge of lunacy. She has very long fair hair, which it occurred to me ought to be carefully inspected. After an application of a small comb the horrible truth was discovered. A louse had found its way among her locks.

"Cut it off, cut it off!" screamed my friend, and started running round the room as though she were demented. I had some difficulty in preventing her from operating with a pair of nail-scissors, but eventually persuaded her to try an application of carbolic oil.

"I never knew why you brought this horrid stuff,"

said Bunny; "but I always suspected there was something in it. You anticipated this!"

As a matter of fact, I had. One application of the oil, however, was all-sufficing, and though occasionally I saw her hand steal up to her head it was purely a matter of imagination.

This was really our only fierce experience with insects all through Russia. But the effects lasted for the remainder of our stay. Never again did we use soft seats, and I would counsel anyone who travels in the U.S.S.R. to follow our example and go hard.

In the daylight we discovered that the hinges of the wardrobe were utterly defective, that one of the arm-chairs had a game leg, and that a magnificent gilt table, inlaid with hand-painted china plaques depicting famous beauties, was badly chipped, and that the portrait of Marie Antoinette was permanently loose. But the beds were soft, the windows clean, and the room commanded a wide view of the street.

"This," I said suddenly, "is Saturday."

"It won't make any difference," Bunny reminded me. "This is not the countryside, where the people get ready for Sunday."

As she spoke round the corner from Worovsky, the main street, came the rumble of motors and the toot of horns. Tremendously excited, we immediately rushed to look out—it seemed ages since we had seen a car. Half a dozen coaches drew up outside the hotel, and discharged a cargo of passengers so obviously European that their appearance was startling. The men wore good cloth suits and felt hats,

the women were well tailored and used powder. We hurried into our coats and hats and pelted downstairs to join the throng. The hall was seething; officials, bearing a badge marked Intourist, were running about among a crowd of people all speaking different tongues—but never a word of English or French among them. More surprising still was a huge banner with the strange device of WELCOME printed in red on a yellow ground, which stretched the length of the huge restaurant.

Long tables spread with knives and forks made our mouths water; the glimpse of a buffet loaded with delectable *hors d'œuvre* roused me to hungry frenzy. We mingled with the throng, and, I confess it, had felonious designs to try to join the meal. But we felt we must not risk too much, and when an official smiled Intourist and motioned us toward the banquet, we honestly shook our heads and murmured, "English."

"But it says Welcome," ejaculated Bunny, "Welcome to the Soil Congress. There it is, staring us in the face. There must be English delegates somewhere. I have an earnest desire to sample soil."

But though we looked carefully, and almost with tears, we could not find a compatriot, nor did any of the hundreds interested in soil understand what we said. Moreover, the hotel staff had to cope with the congress luncheon, and, being up to their inefficient eyes with the job, had no time to take notice of our pantomimic requests.

The Continental is a large, rambling, caravanserai of a place, with a pleasant courtyard abutting on the

restaurant, set out with tables gay with plants and shrubs, the only drawback to this charming spot being the torrent of smuts which poured out of the chimneys, smothering tables, chairs, and food. The congress, already in possession of every available corner of the restaurant, was buzzing about the tables outside, eager and excited.

After long travelling in White Russia in the most primitive conditions, to come across a congress in full swing was like a transformation scene, too good to be true! We sat at a table in the courtyard and watched the staff, white-coated and aproned, spread the feast. It was nearly two, but as yet no food had come along, and the delegates were obviously growing short-tempered. And then, as a voice from Heaven, I heard some English words proceeding from a group on the other side of the courtyard.

I tracked the voice, and asked if the owner, fair-haired and blue-eyed, would help me.

"We want food," I said, "and we can't get any. We don't speak Russian, and the waiters are too busy to find out what we are trying to get."

The young man, in perfectly good American, explained the situation. There would be a slap-up meal at two roubles a head for all the delegates—soup and meat inclusive. He did not think we were eligible for the repast, but would do his best. Meanwhile he explained that he and several hundred others had come from Moscow and were going to Berlin, discussing at each of the capitals the science of soil energy, soil fatigue, and soil rejuvenation.

"How long are you here for?" I asked.

"Just for the day," he answered, for all the world like a Margate tripper. "Long enough to take in this little old burg anyway, and have a run round the country. It's great to be in Russia."

I have no doubt that this young man and the rest of the soilists returned to their respective homes in the belief that they had wrenched the heart out of the cradle of old Russia in a single day, and in high contentment continued their international excavations at the next stopping-place.

Kiev, as we subsequently discovered, is a trippers' paradise during the summer months. Congresses flock into the city every week, and, having done their bit of science, art, or history, go on circular tours round the city under Intourist—the Russian equivalent for Cook's Agency, run by the State. Others, more frankly upon pleasure bent, put in a week-end or sometimes a whole week to do the sights more thoroughly. They are Americans for the most part, with a strong German, Czech, and Polish leaven. The former never seem able to forget the Russian winter climate, for on the hottest day they carry fur coats which make one sizzle even to look at. But the English remain unknown. I was the first woman journalist from this country to visit Kiev since the Revolution.

The American did his good deed very manfully. An old retainer arrived in due course with two plates of *bortsch*, a bottle of Pilsener, and a supply of rye bread. He wore a blue shirt and shiny black trousers,

and walked with a pathetic stoop, as though he carried all the Soviet troubles on his shoulders. But he had friendly eyes and a kind smile, and we called him Little Father from that moment.

The beetroot soup was excellent, and so was the Pilsener, but the rest of the menu was less pleasing. Stewed cow, even in thick brown gravy, still remained cow. An old boot would have been young and tender in comparison. But the potatoes, carrots, turnips, and other trimmings were delicious, and a hot meal in any shape was a very definite treat. It had, however, to serve as a memory for the rest of our trip—stewed cow was definitely off for us.

The luncheon in the restaurant was punctuated by lengthy speeches, which drifted out to us through the open windows like the buzzing of flies. They were listened to respectfully, and translated and retranslated several times. Indeed, it seemed to us that the congress would not get much farther than the dining-room during their day.

We went out, a little tired with the volume of sound, at about four o'clock, to find the streets thronged with people of all ages and conditions. Gone were the decaying figures that so cruelly wrung the heart; gone the limping apathy that dragged itself toward extinction. This was a vital crowd, shabbily dressed, badly shod, but neither barefoot nor in rags. A few, I noticed, wore a melancholy look, with something tragic in their expression—women, for the most part, in the early forties, who perhaps had lost their old roots and lacked the energy to strike anew.

THE PERIL OF SOFT SEATS

There was movement and bustle; the trams, dilatory as ever, though thoroughly well equipped, were covered with clinging bodies. The motor-buses—one deck only—were crammed to the doors. It was the old story: every one wanted to get somewhere, and there was not enough transport to take them.

We followed the main street, Worovsky, with its dilapidated frontages and exquisite old houses, and, turning up a hill, found ourselves in the Proletarian Park. The flower-beds were in full bloom—masses of mauve hydrangea, tall sunflowers, giant mignonette, struck a gay note of colour.

Under the trees, heavy with green boughs, were seats, pleasantly shady, a huge concert-hall open on one side, a newspaper kiosk, a little restaurant for tea and mineral waters. And then in a turn of the road we came on one of those exquisite glimpses of meadow-land and beach, blue water and green hill-side, that Kiev unfolds to those who love her. A happy, laughing throng were bathing from the silver sands far below, shouting with merriment, swimming with superb zest. Small children toddled about in abbreviated blouses, young mothers sat knitting, and far away against the distant skyline rolled the great plains of the Ukraine, with the richest, blackest, most fertile soil in the world.

The Ukrainians, like the White Ruthenians, speak the same language on both sides of the Russo-Polish border. The two peoples have a common civilization, a common stock; their history holds the same legends, struggles, and defeats. In Kiev, the capital

of the Republic, were the first beginnings of that ancient Russian state which gradually grew into the huge empire that ruled so many and such diverse people, imposing on each its imperial tongue. The Soviet has restored the use of Ukrainian to the people. It is taught in the schools, the universities, in all commercial, scientific departments. The alphabetical characters are Russian, to which language Ukrainian largely tends, with a slight strain of Polish.

A strong, proud, virile race, after the War they put up a big bid for an independent republic that would unite both sides of the border. Kiev was captured and recaptured by the Bolsheviks, the Polish, and the national forces, but at last the Ukraine threw in her lot with the Soviet, and in the possession of her own language, religion, and her national arts accepts the economic ruling of the Kremlin and holds fast to the Five Years Plan. A far more cultured people than the White Ruthenians, they have a considerably higher standard of living, both on the farms and in the villages, and their sense of comfort is in line with our own.

But in Kiev, as in Minsk and other towns, the standardization of food and of existence presses on the individual. The restaurant service remains effete; transport is disorganized, and only the Government departments and Intourist use motor-cars.

We spent a delightful hour in the Proletarian Park, where every evening first-rate performances are given on the radio and by a Soviet band. The items in both cases are punctuated by propaganda, passionate

THE PERIL OF SOFT SEATS

demands for tractors, emotional appeals to rally to the cause and defeat the Kulak, who, in intention, though not in flesh, still seeks to despoil the corporate body of the U.S.S.R.

I sometimes think that the curious and unfounded legends as to what is happening in Russia—the persistent rumours that peasants starve while wheat is exported in bulk, priests shot *en bloc*, and churches universally closed—must originate in the proclamations of Stalin, who lets himself go *ad lib* over the wireless. In Russia you learn to distinguish between Soviet facts and Soviet ideals. Stalin as the mouth-piece of the State desires, and if possible intends, to industrialize the whole of Russia, factory and field-side. If in the process of acquiring the necessary machinery the whole native output is exported and the inhabitants go short, it does not matter. But between expression of desire and objective fulfilment there is a cold gulf of logic. The peasants admittedly go short, but they do not starve. In the same way the dictator, bursting with religious atheism, announces that all places of worship should be shut down. But only a few are closed, the rest remain open. In the capital cities there is little opportunity of comparing the Kremlin voice with the life of the community. In the outlying republics the true mean is discovered. Stalin wills for a complete Communism that eliminates individual expression, social or economic, but his will is not the people's, and though standardization obtains in the cities, in the country individual expression still persists.

We bought postcards at the kiosk, registered our opinions on the back, and mailed them home. Every one of these was safely delivered without a word erased, though some of them included a heartfelt description of the battle of the fleas. The OGPU, as far as we were concerned, remained conspicuously aloof.

We bought a bottle of our favourite cranberry, and longed for a meal of fruit and salad. But there were only melons on sale in the open market, of such a gigantic size that we felt it would be like eating vegetable flesh.

The congress was still sitting when we returned to the hotel, or, to be more correct, some portion of it. The remaining part had gone off in the motor-coaches to do the neighbourhood under the care of Intourist guides of many languages. A band was playing, and we sat and listened in the courtyard, watching the shadows creep up the stone walls, on which the lizards sunned themselves. The band was suddenly cut short by a bell, and a throaty speaker took up the parable of soil in what sounded like Finnish. He was followed by a Russian tenor, who sang his heart out in a Ukrainian song so tender, so haunting, that it left a ghostly trail behind it. Here in this hotel, in the courtyard where we now sat, the Tsar of all the Russias had been housed. I seemed to see the tragic little figure crowded by courtiers, resplendent with jewels. I felt the ancient waiter in the blue blouse, eighty years old at least, could have told me many things—he was such an old, old man. I

wondered if he made more or less as a Bolshevik than as a Tsarist waiter!

A German had now taken up the tale, and it seemed as if the congress would go on till midnight, so, tired with the burden and heat of soil, we went out once again into the town. The streets had grown more crowded, the buses if possible more packed. Women were carrying their shopping, men were chatting on the kerbstone, girls and boys rollicked and laughed; there was almost an atmosphere of holiday.

"What can it be?" we asked each other. "Is it a Bolshevik feast or a military anniversary?" But it was no ordained holiday, only the survival of tradition, which, in spite of ukase, still survives. Kiev was keeping Saturday night, as it is kept the whole world over, as the end of the working week. Soviet periods of five days each may be and are lawfully observed, but the habits and desires of the people cannot wholly be suppressed. Saturday is observed not as an expression of defiance, but as a spontaneous relaxation.

It was a gorgeous evening, and everybody was flocking to the park, the shore, with its deep blue bathing-pool, the concert-hall, or the cinema. Small boys were crying newspapers, pedlars were hawking sweetmeats and apples, hoards of peasants and workers from the surrounding districts streamed from the railway-station. The air was brilliant, the heat set your blood aglow. An intoxication of living raised to the *n*th power came from the crowd and seemed to make us one with them.

We wandered through the Worovsky, and turned

into a quiet old thoroughfare which the Revolution had left untouched. Here on a low doorstep sat a patriarchal Jew, his grandchildren at his knee. The gabardine, the ritual curls with other insignia of the race, had disappeared. Only the small black cap remained, the long beard, and the dark, mysterious eyes. They are all good citizens of the Soviet, the Jews. In Kiev the young men work in banks and stores and Government offices, recruit the ranks of tailors, haircutters, and the rest. Only a residuum turn to manual labour. The old men live on family contributions and the small pension allowed the aged by the State. The far-flung antagonism, the long-drawn racial hatred between Jew and Christian, which used to break out into pogroms on the one side, usurious exactions on the other, has passed away. Christian and Jew lie down like lambs!

We found ourselves in a large open space, from which, in breathless beauty, rose a vast dome shimmering with gold. Children were playing, women were knitting close up to the huge gates, through which people passed and repassed. We were on the threshold of St Sofia. We had, moreover, been told that most of the cathedrals had been turned into museums, but, wishing to see all we could, made our way through a pair of swing-doors, along a bare and shabby corridor, horribly void of paint.

As we approached the entrance at the other end we heard a burst of music, sudden, thrilling. Russia once more was unexpected.

Chapter IX

KIEV: THE BEAUTY OF A THOUSAND YEARS

IT is part of the mystery and the fascination of Russia that always through the Soviet present peers the traditional past. But here, beyond these doors, was no depository of things outlived, faith outworn. The service had commenced; the church was awake and vital. Built in the eighth century, St Sofia still covers the city with benignancy, and as of old the nave and aisles were dense with worshippers. The floor was thick with kneeling figures. An old peasant woman at our feet bowed herself to the ground in an ecstasy of adoration; a workman close beside her, simple and unashamed, murmured his prayers. A priest was reading a lesson from a huge Bible bound in silver, a blazing cabochon of emeralds on the corner, flanked by a circle of rubies glowing blood-red. On the altar blazed the sacramental plate, literally ashine with colour from the richest stones, fabulous incrustations of priceless wealth; vast candlesticks, marvellous chalices, reflected the lampshine, glowing like pools of incandescent loveliness.

And this was St Sofia which legend insists the Soviet has shorn of all its glory, confiscating the treasures garnered from a thousand years!

Peasant women from the neighbouring farms in their bright-coloured skirts, head-shawls, and blouses,

MY RUSSIAN VENTURE

men in huge boots and embroidered shirts, Government clerks, shop assistants, professors, beautiful young girls and tiny little children—all of them turning with the eyes of faith toward the altar of their God; all of them waiting for the voice of His anointed to speak His word. A young mother told her beads in a low, tremulous voice; the old peasant bowed her head again and yet again upon the stones. In the centre of the floor was a table holding a silver book flanked by small silver candelabra. Here came women and children to kiss the book and light a candle. From all over the church came the sound of soft whisperings, gentle movement, and above, in unconquerable serenity, unbearable beauty, rose the great dome.

There was a sudden hush. Church and congregation waited with expectancy.

To most of us there comes a moment when the sense of beauty is so poignant that it floods consciousness, and for a breathless, matchless space we are contained in it. Suddenly from hidden heights in an unearthly loveliness the Russian choir began to chant. The basses, black and soft and deep as night, the altos upspringing to the gates of Heaven, weaving a pattern of sound that fell upon the ear in a revelation of pure ecstasy, unbelievable fulfilment. The music grew wings and floated through the vast dome, enveloping priest, people, and choir in its protectiveness. The congregation stirred, the gates of the shrine within the sacred precincts opened; gates of gold, shining with precious stones, revealed the Host

descending from on high. The people crossed themselves and bowed their heads. Waves of incense drifted down the nave. Another choir took up the strain. A procession of priests and deacons wound its way to the altar rails, and presently a tall, strong figure in a vestment of gold sewn with precious gems, which glinted with a thousand eyes, addressed the congregation.

He was bearded, and wore the head-dress of the Greek Orthodoxy, high, octagonal, munificent with gems. He had a deep voice fraught with understanding, and spoke from the steps of the altar, slightly raised above the congregation. He talked to them as his children; you felt he was stretching out a spiritual hand to give them help. The crowd closed up nearer, and those on the edge pressed in. I looked back on a sea of faces all watching with reverence and faith—they had come there to worship their God and listen to His prophet. Moreover, they were prepared to make sacrifices for their religion.

A white-robed deacon bearing a huge silver tray and a softly tinkling bell moved through the crowd. He was followed by a lovely young girl in the traditional Russian head-dress and with heavy braids of fair hair; an exquisite creature with the virginal eyes of a Madonna. The people put their money on the tray, and if they wanted it helped themselves to change. One old woman gave a rouble and took back eighty kopeks; a small boy put in five kopeks, his mother ten. And so all round the church, gathering the sheaves of the faithful to pay for the upkeep of

the cathedral and make provision for the clergy. In the end the Pope blessed his people, signing the forehead of those who came to him with holy water, a tiny baby acolyte holding a bowl for replenishing the golden sceptre. Old and young, tragic and eager, they lined up, raising their faces until the last note of the heavenly chorus died away, the last of the leaping candle flames upon the altar were extinguished—the service ended. And as I watched the dense mass of people passing through the big doors, listened to the tread of hundreds of feet, I realized that here was a force that, withstanding centuries and centuries of corruption and decay, would survive every kind of revolution—*plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*.

We had been in the cathedral four hours, but it might have been four minutes. The chief service of the week in the Greek Orthodox church of Russia was always held on Saturday evening, when the people after their weekly bath, in receipt of their wages, turned to their church as to their home. And the custom still continues. From six till ten in the great cathedral God is praised in the highest.

We went out into the blue night, with a feeling of stimulus and inward serenity that not even a few miscarried arrows of misfortune could quell. They were sharp arrows—mosquitoes, in fact, who had dined heavily from our legs in the cathedral, permeating upward to our arms and neck. I had got off comparatively lightly. It was poor Bunny who once again was victimized. What tiny bits of flesh she

still possessed unscathed had now been invaded, and she walked about with her legs, arms, and hands swathed in handkerchiefs.

As the evening grew on the inflammation grew worse.

"I shall go mad if I don't do something. I must have a bath," she said, and in considerable doubt as to whether such a thing were in any way possible, I promised that a bath she should have.

Vain hope! Elusive promise!

We found the hotel deserted except for the remnants of the congress waiting in the hall for the motor-coach to take them to a train. We wondered just how much or how little of Kiev they had really seen or sensed. None of them had gone to St Sofia—I doubt if many had even troubled to visit the Proletarian Park.

We rang the bell when we reached our large and airless room. It had double windows, but both sets were shut, compulsorily, as we afterward found out, otherwise mosquitoes enter. Nobody answered the bell; nobody ever does in Russia, not because it is beneath the dignity of a Soviet worker to reply, but because the bell is always out of order and does not ring. However, we turned on the tap labelled "Hot" in the wash-basin and let it run in faith for three-quarters of an hour. And then, in the name of efficiency, it was hot, quite hot, for fifteen minutes.

But though grateful to an unaccustomed skin, it was not sufficient for my friend. Nothing would alleviate her sufferings but total immersion.

Accordingly I sallied forth and explored the corridor,

running a houseman to earth in a kind of pantry full of brushes, brooms, and an automatic sweeper. He was very tall and lean and melancholy, and one eye was entirely concealed by a large black shade. I led him back in triumph, and Bunny enacted a complete pantomime of her requirements. He grinned, nodded, was endowed with a rouble, and we sat and waited in expectancy. It was a long interval. The heat and noise of the town through the double windows beat incessantly, a band promenaded the streets, a group of Soviet scouts shouted a marching-song, a belated motor-coach sounded its horn. I was more than half asleep when Hubert—he reminded me of Prince Arthur's gaoler coming to burn out both his captive's eyes—once more appeared and beckoned us along the corridor through a heavy door and into the most gaunt bathroom that anybody could imagine. Bare but for a bath and one small chair; there was neither mat, towel, nor any of the more civilized accoutrements. The bath was very uninviting—rusty, and generally shabby-looking. The idea of contact did not appeal to me, but Bunny's sufferings stiffened her will. She took her towel, rubbed briskly, and proved that the surface of the bath was clean—at any rate the dirt did not come off. Hubert turned on the water, bowed profoundly, and went out with me.

What followed I heard from Bunny later.

The water was hot, the bites were alleviated, and she was beginning to feel almost normal, when suddenly the stopper of the bath flew up into the air and torrents of the blackest water shot through the pipe—

presumably the waste from the floor above. Bunny coped quickly with the situation. She flushed out the bath, replaced the stopper and sat on it, firmly keeping it in place. For a while all went well, until she felt the stopper quivering under heavy pressure from the other side. And then the waste-pipe running down the side of the wall protested, and little spurts of water, black as before, broke through. That finished my poor friend. She gave up the attempt as a bad job and staggered back burning with indignation. And there we sat in the room with the gilt table and the hand-painted plaques, the mahogany wardrobe and the elegant couch, amazed at the absurdity of a *régime* that could not arrange for a decent ordinary bath with a normal waste-pipe!

And this at the Continental, the home of congresses, the haunt of American millionaires, where we were paying £2 12s. 6d. per night! But for all its idiosyncrasies we determined to remain there. We had sampled the other extreme of hotel accommodation in Minsk—it was as well to see what the most expensive as well as the cheapest could offer us.

I made long and careful inquiries as to what happens to the ordinary householder with a taste for total immersion. But the question was always somehow gently shelved. I gathered that the older houses suffered like the hotels from decayed plumbing, and I believe that the new flats and tenements are not much better. Public baths, however, are being built and the old ones reconstructed, and the younger generation of townfolk will undoubtedly take as cheerfully to

communal washing as to communal eating or sleeping. Bunny, however, had had her first and last bath in Russia, and thereafter continued the serial number sort of ablutions we had endured all through.

For the fragmentary bath we were charged three roubles!

Apart from these trifling disorganisms, life at the Continental was most fascinating. There was hardly a day without a fresh excursion—Canadians, doing a six weeks' tour of Europe in tabloid form, poured in and dealt out hands of visiting-cards as though they were playing a new kind of society bridge; university dons, carefully shepherded from Moscow; American women, all guided and *entouraged* by Intourist. And all the while the hotel and its inner and mysterious life went on unaltered. Bells remained unmended, meals continued to be late, patience became exhausted, and *saychass* remained the order of the day.

Sometimes an international group would protest loudly, and demand explanations from the guides as to these details. The guides, for the most part women who knew sufficient of the particular language necessary for explanation, had to placate their charges. They always reported to the office of Intourist on the ground floor of the hotel, where a large fat man with a white face sat, in receipt of custom, taking roubles and, as we suspected, harrying the guides—young, pretty, and, generally speaking, very charming. 'Spideree,' as we called him, thought he spoke English, but he really knew little more than 'yes' and 'no,' which he used quite impartially.

KIEV

Intourist is in charge of the tours from London and other capitals to Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, etc.—all those scheduled itineraries which the incurious embark upon. They arrange the hotel accommodation, and generally overlook all the tourist machinery. A flat rate of twenty-five pounds covers a period of three weeks, starting from London and including lodging and food. There are, however, special fees for more personally conducted tours, and an American woman told me she had paid five pounds a day for the privilege of an individual *cicerone*. But individuals and groups alike are shepherded, and, like sheep, are fed, the mental pabulum served up being strictly according to a routined recipe.

We were outside all these arrangements. We preferred to take life as it came and attend on opportunity. Meanwhile the climate was a pure joy, the country undreamt-of loveliness.

Our usual menu was simple but pleasant, with breakfast of tea and rolls in our room, fruit and rolls for lunch, which we carried with us, and salad, eggs, and tomatoes at night. This in the intense heat we found quite sufficient.

On one particular day, however, we came back famished. We had gone for a marvellous trip on the Dnieper deep into the country where the earth, black as onyx, grows unbelievable crops of wheat, giant oats, and huge barley; where acres and acres of cultivated land melt into wooded hills, which stretch back to an invisible skyline farther than the eye can reach. It was a day of many memories. We had

made friends on the boat with a peasant family, who took Bunny to their bosom. We had seen droves of pigs, motherly sows, and tiny piglets all pink and grunting. We had watched herds of cows going to the milking-sheds, and droves of cattle tended by a small child with a big stomach and an abbreviated shirt. The sun had burned our faces, the Dnieper had stolen our hearts. But for all the glories of the day we wanted real food, and wanted it badly.

The restaurant at the Continental, diverted from the Soil Congress, proved to be large and lofty, with carpeted floors, wide windows, and a general air of seeming comfort. We took our seats at a table, and tried to catch the attention of a waiter. Hopeless! Useless! It was Minsk over again. Thirty other tables were trying to do the same thing.

Government officials, doctors, scientists, secretaries, frequent the Continental, and occasional parties from a Collectivist farm. The manual workers do not often come there—they use the club or the public restaurant.

"I can't wait any longer," I said at last. "I'm going to see what happens if I help myself."

The *delicatessen* counter opening on to the restaurant took my attention. Here were Russian salads, tiny carrots, beetroots, peas, cucumbers, and leaves of lettuce with delicious *mayonnaise*, hard-boiled eggs, sardines, white bread, and even Gruyère cheese. The Ukraine is abundantly rich in every kind of produce, and the chief of the Continental, being an enterprising man, takes advantage of the market to

vary his menu. But though he is a good caterer his staff is short-handed.

I went up to the counter, smiled at the fine-looking woman in charge, and pointed to the salads, eggs, a piece of Gruyère, and some rolls. She nodded and heaped them on two plates, which for a breathless moment I thought she was going to let me carry off. But only Soviet hands must transport Soviet food, and I was being waved away when, from the corner of my eye, I observed our dear old Little Father shambling in the distance. I was after him like the wind, brought him back in triumph, and waited while he loaded up.

When he and I returned to Bunny she was not alone. A Russian woman had joined her at the table—and was speaking fluent English. She had watched our pantomime work, and had come to see if she could help us. About eight-and-thirty, with humorous eyes and a soft, melancholy mouth, Miranda—there are reasons why she should be so named—brainy, cultured, and with an unassuagable curiosity for life, had survived the Revolution, and with the loss of her possessions, the dispersal of her friends and most of her family, had struck roots in the new *ménage*.

She was obviously city-bred; her clothes, marked by the universal shabby sadness, were put on with an air. She wore her hat at a certain angle, and, in spite of bygone fashion and immediate paucity of choice, remained *chic*. She had never been to England, she told us, but had learned our language in books and through a German teacher. She was quite free from

any accent of Americanism, and it gave us a thrill to hear her mention our latest authors, the newest movements in art. Miranda was in a Government department—I did not ask which one—and at the moment was translating modern English playwrights into Ukrainian.

Miranda was married, but I gathered either she or her husband had registered a divorce. Still, she had her boy of thirteen, though already the shadow of separation fell between them. He was shortly leaving school for the polytechnic and then on to the university. This meant, as I knew, that he would live on his own with the help of a Government subsidy. He was, she told me, mad on engineering.

A fragile-looking woman, with extraordinary reserves of endurance, there was a haunting sadness about her, the aftermath of the old *régime*, it seemed to me. And yet her enthusiasm was boundless, her Soviet loyalty ingrained.

We sat till long past twelve that night discussing modern books. No one interfered, no one moved us on. Gradually the restaurant emptied, the lights went out in the hall, the waiters departed. But we stayed on unhindered among empty tables and ghostly chairs. Kiev is late to bed; the town is alive and talking till the early hours of the morning. On the other hand, it does not go early to work. The Spartan system of Minsk, where the workers are up and doing at sunrise, is softened in the Ukraine. The city does not get going until nine, and the Continental is always deserted until half-past.

The next morning Miranda called for us at eleven. She was on holiday, she explained, and would like to show us something of the city. We had already done some exploration on our own, but there was still the Lavro to visit, the great monastery that since the eighth century had housed hundreds of monks. The scene of countless miracles, it preserved the bodies of innumerable saints who, untouched by the embalmer's art, remained untainted by corruption.

The Lavro, half an hour's tram-ride from the centre, lies on the outskirts of Kiev. The grounds that used to be flowering oases of scent and colour are given over nowadays to weeds and nettles. The paths are overgrown, and the dank undergrowth has a bitter smell. But neither weeds nor desolation can veil the glory of the building. Those ancient domes, those pure-lined cupolas, point to the sky in everlasting beauty. The treasures of the monastery are fabulous and inexhaustible. Bibles bound in beaten gold, with huge sapphires, enormous rubies, unwinking as the sun; crosses inlaid with topaz, chrysoprase, and turquoise, ancient missals glowing with colour, fresh as though laid on yesterday; ikons framed in wrought metal, patterned with gems; heavy silver ewers, slender and golden cups, plates wonderfully enamelled—the richness, the sheer barbaric splendour, overcame us. Persian carpets, silken tapestries, chapels with such priceless trappings that the vast treasure-house of the East must have been ravished for the furnishing.

But the chapels are shorn of divine service, the golden Bibles are unopened, the sacramental plate

untouched. And the monks, who for twelve hundred years had said the office, worked in the gardens, tended the poor, and made *kwass*—a very pleasing liquor from fermented bread—are scattered to the ends of the earth.

We leaned on the stone wall that marks the boundary of the gardens, looking down upon the Dnieper with its smooth-running tide.

"The monks had this wall built to keep out the water," said Miranda. "In the old days the Dnieper used to rise so high that the gardens were in danger of being washed away. But the Government is building a huge dam on the river which will regulate the tides and incidentally supply electric power for the whole district. The dam is one of the largest works in existence. The engineers are American and German. The Soviet has not yet the knowledge or experience for so big an undertaking.

"Thousands of pilgrims used to come to the Lavro from all over Russia to make offerings. Rich men gave their lands and their money, so that the monastery grew to be one of the wealthiest brotherhoods in the world. The Soviet has taken the land and the money for the State. The gold and silver plate, as you can see, they left untouched."

When the Revolution came the brotherhood was not disbanded, but only a handful stayed on at the Lavro, where they remained until eighteen months ago. And then a terrible scandal arose. A little boy playing in the gardens found some bones. He took them home, and his father, feeling curious, came with

him the next day and began to dig on the spot where the child had discovered them. Just below the earth, quite near the surface, was found the body of a woman, cut in pieces. The flesh had shrivelled, but the skin remained; the properties of the air preserve a skeleton for a long time. Investigation followed, and a brutal crime was disclosed. A woman used to come to the monastery who, it was said, was the mistress of one of the monks. He was arrested and put on trial for murder. Evidence disclosed that the woman, jealous of his attentions to a young girl, had threatened to make trouble, and finally the monk had silenced her.

"Do you think he was really guilty?" I asked.

For the first time the shadow of the OGPU seemed to draw near.

"The trial was fully reported," answered Miranda, "and the witnesses remained unshaken."

"Was the monk hanged?"

Miranda looked reproachful.

"We have no capital punishment in Russia," she said. "It is only counter-revolutionaries who are shot as enemies of the Soviet. But murder is only a crime against an individual. The monk was sent to prison for eight years. After the trial the Lavro was quite deserted. The monks joined those of the brethren who had gone to the monastery at Vellano, off the Finnish coast, or rejoined their families and worked on the land."

"And the treasures—will they remain here?"

"Why not? Our Government believes in keeping up those buildings and ornaments which are period.

MY RUSSIAN VENTURE

The Lavro is typical, and its form is very fine, like the plate. There is a charge for admission which covers the cost of maintenance. For myself I like beauty. I could wish that some of our modern buildings were not so purely utilitarian. But our Government knows best. . . . The treasures are held under the joint guardianship of the Hierarchy and the Executive Council of the Ukraine. There is an inventory of them all."

From the light and colour of the gardens we went into the darkness and silence of the tombs. We followed Miranda across a tangled wilderness of weeds, through a narrow doorway into pitch-black night and a sudden icy cold. The next minute the custodian switched on the electric light, but the temperature remained Arctic. Down shallow stone steps, worn hollow by millions of feet, along stone passages, flanked by narrow doors opening on to the cells, small as the grave, as chill and as lonely, the air growing more stagnant, the smell of the earth pushing up between the stones.

"In the old days," said Miranda, "the monks had only candlelight. Some of them who spent most of their time praying in their cells went half blind. Our Government has altered nothing; everything is left almost untouched, just as it was centuries ago."

Incredibly tiny, terribly bare, so old, so dreadfully old that the burden of the years weighed the stones down, pushing them deep into the ground, farther and farther from the sunshine—they were not cells, but sepulchres. There was a break in the corridor,

a recess suddenly opened out; under an electric lamp lay a huge coffin. In the lid was a small opening fitted with glass, and through the transparency we caught a glimpse of a face ancient beyond the name, but still preserving the impress of human suffering, human dignity.

"That is the body of a monk who died in the thirteenth century. He has been preserved—the priests say by a miracle, others attribute it to the air."

We passed some half-dozen of these coffins, all of them bearing the seal of the Church and the seal of the Soviet.

"On a date to be agreed by both parties the coffins are to be opened before representatives of the Hierarchy and our Government, who will search for documents or valuables historically interesting. The rest of the coffins—there were hundreds—have been buried in the ground outside. The monks used to keep their dead inside the monastery in rows and rows."

We emerged into the light of day dazed and a little tremulous. The vision of those monkish figures living, praying, dying, in those dark holes laid bony fingers on the smiling country, the silver river, the Soviet sun.

We passed under the great dome of the chapel, resplendent with golden candlesticks, at whose altar Catherine the Great had prayed and the long line of Tsars who followed after her. The quiet interior seemed to blaze for a moment with the picture of the Empress, vital, dominant, with all the cruelty and the passion of her adopted country. Had she, I wondered,

turned the pages of the Book of Life, gorgeous with sapphires? Had her eyes rested on those ikons crusted with gems?

And so from a bejewelled past to a clamorous present. . . . We left the Lavro and joined a huge crowd waiting for the tram back to Kiev.

The people were queuing up at the terminus; we waited for an hour, but still we were a long way down the line, and still the people hurled themselves like pebbles on the footboards, streamed like flies up the steps. One rule, and one only, is enacted. Terminus or no terminus, you must not come out by the same door as you went in.

At the end of another quarter of an hour Miranda got perturbed on our account. In vain we assured her that we preferred to share and share alike, and were quite content to look at the people and admire the children. No, we were the guests of her country, and as such should be shown preference.

Now unjust preference is a thing that Bunny and I hate—you lose all the fun of the fair if you are put first on the swings—and we were out for experience rather than comfort. But Miranda would have none of it, and, forgetting that our clothes, let alone our speech, betrayed us as foreign and possibly hostile, she requested the conductor to let us in at the wrong end and so secure some seats.

Would he consent? Not a bit of it. The fire of equality blazed in his veins. First come first served was the practice, and he for one would never break it. The crowd applauded, Miranda protested, the

conductor remained adamant, the tram rolled away full.

I took off my hat to that conductor. He reconciled me very largely to the hopeless fashion in which the egalitarian trams are run—always late, overcrowded, hopeless from every practical point of view!

We were lucky with the next one, however, and found seats opposite a large peasant with a small wife and a splendid-looking workman, ruddy with brickdust. Miranda looked tired, but she refused to take a rest and go home, so we persuaded her to come back with us to supper.

And once again we consumed our souls in patience, waiting and waiting for Soviet salad and Soviet eggs!

Chapter X

THE COMMUNA HAS BEEN BORN— THE COMMUNA WILL LIVE

THE Ukraine held us in enchantment—the silver Dnieper with its magic spell, the long, luxuriant meadow-stretches in full fecundity. But for all our pleasure and interest we were not yet content. We wanted very urgently to visit the comunas of the district and compare them with those of White Russia. We had caught glimpses of their activity from the steamer, had heard the strains of the *balalaika*, the voices of men and women, the day's work done, floating on the evening air under the black velvet sky with its sickle moon. But we were anxious to see the farms at close quarters.

We approached Spideree for information as to the topography of the country, but he was not helpful. According to that man of webs, there was but one farm worth visiting, hundreds of miles away, which could be reached only by a three days' voyage down the river, it being necessary to remain there three days before we could return, "owing to the tides," and the price he named for the voyage was so enormous that it would have left us high and dry even for tram-fares. He was, however, most emphatic that there was nowhere else that we could go, and, though quite unbelieving, it was exceedingly difficult to get past his statement.

No one in the hotel seemed able to give us any help in this direction. None of the Canadian- and American-speaking tourists were in the least interested in these farms, and, like the majority of people who pay a cursory visit to Russia, seemed to suppose that the State and the Collectivist farms are one and the same things, instead of being the expression of two utterly divergent aims and philosophies.

Eventually, however, the existence of Sparta was discovered to us, one of the oldest and most typical Collectivist farms in the Ukraine, and within some three hours' railway journey. Miranda promised to go with us on her first free day, which fell that week on Tuesday, and arranged to call early in the morning. We were up and dressed by seven-thirty, as it was said that the train would leave by nine, and we had to get to the station by an over-crowded tram or omnibus.

We took with us lunch for three—six rolls of rye bread, one side thinly spread with butter, and a shaving of cheese, at a cost of seventeen shillings for the six! We wanted some fruit, but the hotel was still locked in slumber, so we picked up some pears in the open market as we went along. It was a glorious morning, but Miranda smelt rain, so we took our mackintoshes, and we managed to scramble on a motor-bus which went at breakneck speed to the station. Water-carriers, egg-sellers, crowded on the platform; excursions of workers poured through the doors; groups of peasants still slumbered everywhere. Feverish inquiries revealed the fact that the train had not arrived. It had been left over from the day

before, when it should have come to Kiev by midnight, but up till 4 A.M. it had not been heard of.

"Therefore," said Miranda, "it may perhaps appear quite soon." She always spoke with affectionate understanding of the vagaries of the railway system.

"After all," she said, "it is quite usual, almost dull, always to know the train will keep its time, whereas it is an adventure never to be certain how or when you go."

I agreed that it is better to have lost the train than never to have gone at all. But all the same I wished that the time-table would for once be less amusing and more stable.

But the wretched locomotive did not turn up; indeed, there seemed considerable dubiety as to whether it had ever existed at all, or if it did come, whether it was going in the desired direction. We trailed after Miranda from pillar to post, in and out of offices, interrogating the station-master, the booking-clerk, the signalman, the shunters, every imaginable remnant of supposed authority.

All to no end! The train was not. "We had better have something to eat," said Miranda, and we all went to the buffet and had a piece of cheese-roll and a glass of tea.

It was half-past eleven when the truant pushed in, not in the least ashamed or even sorry, but with all the *insouciance* of a spring lamb. There were no soft seats—for which we were truly thankful—and the hard ones were overcrowded.

"The train stops at every station," Miranda explained, "and the journey will take us three hours."

She composed herself, wedged tightly against the window, and Bunny, as to the manner born, followed suit. I settled myself in the opposite corner, and watched my fellow-passengers and their impedimenta.

Here were no poultry or household gear. A few women were carrying their unsold stocks of beets and apples, cabbages and cucumbers, back from the market, but for the most part the crowd seemed disposed for holiday. Under the Soviet system of five working days and one rest day contingents of the proletariat get off on most mornings for a country trip. They were neater, better turned out, than the trippers we had met before. They all wore shoes—except the market-women—and the shirts and blouses were clean, the suits patched but unragged. Small babies lay quiescent in their swaddling-clothes, little children squatted content upon the floor.

Presently at a wayside station we picked up a passenger of a startlingly different type. Young—in the thirties, I should say—fair and plump, with a soft, round face and figure whose corseted curves would later be a little overripe, she was dressed in one of the smartest tailor-mades that you could wish to see. Perfectly cut, the blue cloth in hang and finish might have come from London, or more likely Vienna. She wore a small, *chic* hat, patent shoes, with sun-brown silk stockings and gloves to match, and carried an admirable infant all wrapped up in a white silk shawl. She was an amazing apparition in that country of shabby skirts and dingy coats. It was so long since

we had seen a well-dressed woman that our eyes were unaccustomed to such a sight. We could hardly keep from staring. She took her seat with a quiet air, not in the least self-conscious, and smiled at her neighbour, who returned the greeting.

She was, I presumed—there was no resisting the suggestion—a lady of pleasure. No other woman could have secured such clothes. They were, as Miranda explained, imported, lock, stock, and barrel, so to speak. From the crown of her up-to-date hat to the toe of her *chic* shoe she was foreign-clad, which meant that the sum-total of her wardrobe would reach to a prodigious amount. For every article imported, small or large, a heavy tariff is imposed, which brings the cost of a costume, stockings, gloves, and the rest to four times the original amount. This was obviously common knowledge, for, though admiring and appraising looks were cast on the lady, no one seemed resentful or surprised. It was not as if her garments symbolized class-distinction, economic unfairness, unjust distribution. Her attire merely meant that part of her fees were sartorial offerings—no one man could provide the whole—and that her taste was extremely good.

She laughed and chatted and exhibited the infant with unbounded pride, and the women, married or single, were quite friendly, and obviously did not grudge her anything.

“But,” said Miranda, “she is not a good citizen. She does not work and so help the Five Years Plan. And for that reason she is not respected.”

THE COMMUNA WILL LIVE

"I doubt if she would be much use in a factory or on a farm," I hazarded.

"There are other occupations. She could perhaps go upon the stage or on the films and so take part in Soviet propaganda. There is no feeling here against what in your country you call prostitution. To us matters of sex are a question of individual judgment. We do not think badly of a woman because she has many lovers—we despise her because she is not on the roll of workers. She has neither a labour-ticket nor a food-card. She is classed with the beggar and the disfranchised. It is her own choice."

Impossible to rule out human nature! Even in a land of facile marriage and divorce, where even mutual passion can be gratified without incurring social censure, the prostitute still flourishes. The priestess of men's lust, men's longings, the mirage in which they can escape themselves and see only that which for the moment they desire, she is as old as life, as indestructible as death.

The train crawled on. Elderly men with their wives and families clambered in with picnic-baskets; their look, their bearing, the manner in which they bore their shabbiness, set them apart somehow from peasants and farm-workers. Obviously *intelligentsia*, they were on excellent terms with everybody.

"They are countryfolk," said Miranda, "and had small estates before the Revolution, and a position. But they did not try to keep either. They joined the Communist party and worked hard for the Soviet. You see," she explained, "we Ukrainians love our

country as part of the U.S.S.R. We have our liberty and our language. Both were denied us under the Tsar."

I remembered our Don Quixote of the green coat in Minsk, and felt glad that in the Ukraine the older generation had not been sentenced socially to die. Many of these smaller country gentry, I learned, were employed in the offices concerned with the accountancy of a huge group of Collectivist farms which have formed themselves into a giant corporation. Others have been absorbed in the banks. Few, however, are admitted into administrative departments, their education, their upbringing, the advantages that they were able to give their pre-Revolution children, are held against them.

It was just on two when at last we reached our stopping-place. The station, well built and commodious, serves a large district remote from the railway and only to be reached by the *teliega* already waiting; but instead of sitting on straw we were provided with wooden seats, balanced precariously from the sides of the cart, and liable, I felt, at any moment to collapse. The *teliega* quickly filled up, and we set off on a good road, quite soundly built and cultivated to its very edge.

The Ukraine is miles ahead of White Russia in agricultural and industrial development and general culture. The soil is as rich as the other is poor. The people, big, sanguine, and refulgent, have a higher standard of comfort, make a larger demand on life.

White Russia contrasts unfavourably with White

THE COMMUNA WILL LIVE

Ruthenia, on the Polish side, but the Russian Ukrainian is as comfortably housed as his brother across the border, and the native arts and crafts are identically the same.

Acres on acres of huge cabbages, beet, cucumbers, oats, wheat, and rye rolled back to the far-off skyline. Men and women in the cornfields waved a greeting as we passed. The hum of giant tractors reaping, binding, threshing, vibrated through the air. Life was full of movement, of colour. The girls sang as they tossed the sheaves, and peals of laughter came over the long meadows. The *teliega* stopped at the cross-roads; we scrambled out, the rest continuing their journey farther on.

I shall never forget my first impression of Sparta. The farmhouse, with its white walls and green shutters, sprawled comfortably over a big yard. On the steps stood a broad-chested, brown-skinned man with white teeth and a distinguished head.

"He is the manager," said Miranda, and introduced us. Leadership and capacity were in every line of his figure. He was the elected representative of the workers on the communa and chairman of committee. He moved and spoke with the authority of the freely chosen man who knows his people, their limitations and their qualities, as he knows the resources and possibilities of the land they hold in common.

He took us straight into the office with the familiar *shchetah*, a writing-desk, and the inevitable posters. A good-humoured crowd suddenly flocked in from the

stables and the fields, and we stood, the centre of friendly faces, while Miranda explained who and what we were. We had come quite unexpectedly, but they gave us an ample welcome, and everything we saw was utterly unprepared.

Sparta—they love those classic references in Russia—had started as an ideal, not to say Christian, commonwealth. When the men came back from the army in 1920, before the Five Years Plan was adumbrated, some of them, filled with that desire for brotherly love and universal peace which proceeds from the sword, decided to take over the land sequestered from the former owners and cultivate it for the general good.

“No books were kept, no wages were paid,” the manager explained—Miranda translated. “Everybody shared alike and did as they liked. But as some liked to work and others preferred to be lazy, the farm began to go to rack and ruin, and complaints rose on every side. Alas! we are not good enough for Christian Socialism.” He grinned delightfully, and offered us an apple. “And so Sparta had to begin all over again, this time on sound economic principles, and now each man has his work and his wages, and if his work is not good, then the communa deals with him through me, their manager. But as we all want the farm to pay we all put our backs into the business. For though wages vary between one man’s job and another’s, we all draw the same dividend according to the number of our shares. The better the harvest, the higher the rate.”

THE COMMUNA WILL LIVE

But in spite of the business organization, the keen administration, something, I felt, of that first idealism still remained. I never knew a place where such a rich and ripe contentment of body and soul seemed to abide. There was a freedom, an eagerness, a burgeoning of the mind and the emotion that to me stamped the communa with a definite and most attractive personality.

Through the open doors came the chug of the reaping-machines, the neighing of the horses, the lowing of cattle. Some of the Ukrainian farms number many hundreds of souls, but Sparta is content with seven hundred and fifty, men, women, and children, made up from sixty families, living in separate cottages or in the communa's buildings, and single men and girls who lodge in the neighbouring village.

"You shall see everything," said Columbus—his eyes, his short-trimmed beard, the spirit of the man, were the Spaniard's reincarnate. "Let us go first to the farm nurseries, but you must step softly, for the little ones are asleep."

We tiptoed through the door of a large and airy room full of small cots, each with its tiny occupant. The open windows were shaded by green curtains, the walls were cleanly whitewashed. The nurse, young, comely, and highly efficient, was neatly dressed.

"The children live here till they are four years old," she said. "And we take them from a few days. The mothers come from their work to feed them when it is time. At four they go back to their parents, and begin very soon to help in the fields and in the

workshops—even the smallest ones make themselves useful, as all kiddies can.”

“And if the mothers prefer to keep their babies in the home?” I asked.

“They please themselves. But it is difficult for a mother to work on the land and look after her baby at the same time, and not so good for the child. At Sparta, at any rate, most of the mothers prefer to leave them with me.”

There was another nursery for very tiny infants, and a room where the small people fed—low tables set with wooden bowls and spoons, with slices of rye bread. From the nursery we went to the living quarters of one of the farm-hands.

A pretty woman in a charming peasant dress, heavy braids of hair upon her shoulders, invited us in. The room was well furnished and most tastefully decorated. On a big bed, built into the wall and covered with a hand-woven quilt of white and green, was the husband, sleeping as only a Russian can. He had been on duty since the dawning, and was off for a few hours’ rest. A *kelim*—hand-woven carpet—covered the floor, and another in a beautiful pattern, wine-coloured, green, and blue, decorated one wall, while Lenin, festooned with exquisite embroideries of red and white, placarded another. A small boy of three was playing with a beautiful old kneading-trough, and an infant of a fortnight old, like a delicate waxen image, lay impassive in a small wooden cradle in the centre of the room. There was a bowl of soup, half full, on the table, and a piece of bread—the little

lady had fetched her dinner from the kitchen; her husband had eaten his in the communa hall. I have never seen anything more restful, more pleasing, more homelike, than that room.

"You see," Miranda interpolated, "she does not have to do anything hard or dirty. All the washing, the cooking, and the cleaning up are done in the laundry, the kitchen, and the scullery outside. She has only to keep the bed made and the room tidy."

We had a look into several other rooms, all of them pleasant, with attractive carpets, quilts, and wooden carvings—products not of the factory, but of the home fireside. Small homes, simple people, quiet intimacies, centred in a flood-tide of organized industry. Work for all, and all implicitly at work—it seemed to me that the secret of living had been discovered at Sparta. For here were the fruits of the earth and the fulness thereof, the close contact with growing things that keeps the mind fresh and the heart humble, and at the same time the knowledge that no man labours to make profit for another, but only for the common good; that the hardest and most menial of household tasks are not repetitive and single-handed, like an everlasting washing up, but are shared out; moreover, that the loneliness, the forcing in of winter, when man may not meet man for days, is finally shut away.

If ever I should find myself stripped of my craft, unable by some unexpected crash to earn my bread by writing, I should wish for nothing better than to go to an English Sparta, if such a one were possible,

and to contribute my mite of labour to the sum-total of effort. I fear the proposition might not be accepted, but the idea still blossoms in my heart. There, in the lush grass, among the lowing herds, the rich, ripe corn that like a golden sea ripples under a sapphire sky, I should find good fellowship, good food, good thought, and a complete absence of any exploitation. What could a poor scribbler ask for more?

I should undoubtedly be relegated to the pots and pans department, but Bunny would be worthy of her hire as a maker of hay, a bearer of sheaves. She radiated in the Ukrainian atmosphere, and made friends with the little pigs, the velvet-nozzled horses, young men and maidens, old men and silent cows.

And then we were asked to join the household at dinner. A long, narrow trestle-table stretched the length of the hall, and I never saw a jollier crowd sit down together. *Bortsch*—cabbage soup—and a thick white broth with onions, potatoes, and rye bread, hot from the oven, formed the menu, and as the company grew larger they spread out into the courtyard, where presently we also found ourselves, steaming plates before us. The bread was very good, the soup delicious, but even better than the food were the wonderful spoons with which we ate. Round, polished, painted, varnished, it was impossible to regard them as mere wood—hard as steel, a joy to the eye, a temptation to the palate. Bunny could not eat for admiration, and presently a pretty peasant girl, who tripped barefooted over stubble fields as though she trod on velvet lawns, whispered to Miranda that the communa

wished to give a wooden spoon to each of us as a memento. We have them now, and as I write the delicate bowls, patterned in rose and golden brown, the shapely stems, recapture for a moment the radiance of that afternoon.

I had sensed so grimly the dim obliteration of the older cities, the standardization of the new towns, with the denial of the individual, that even the enthusiasm and the ecstasy of Soviet youth could not erase the impression. I had felt a quickening of spirit in the communes of White Russia, but there the intensive toil, the sparse return, the lack of mental alertness, life's general drabness, weighed the impact. But here in this country endowed with prodigal gifts of sun and soil, life-giving warmth, prodigious fertility, one saw the blossom of individual fulfilment rising from a Communist root in full flower.

Sparta is only one of the many communal farms that we visited, but, though it is our favourite, it is no more expressive of the Collectivist movement than hundreds of others. Whatever may happen in the future, whether, as I believe, the Five Years Plan comes to ultimate fruition, whether the mental worker eventually secures a recognition of brain-value equal to muscle-value, of one thing I am convinced—the communa with its unique combination of corporate labour and individual earning, federated interest and personal liberty, public spirit and private life, has come to stay. It is the full expression of the Russian peasant, at once co-operative and self-centred.

We watched the most modern of American patents

thresh the corn, turn out the straw, and in one comprehensive movement toss the trusses into a huge heap, later to be stacked and thatched for winter. Young girls ran to and fro with loads of straw upon their head and shoulders, feeding the machine with careful rapidity. We could not understand how they could bear the contact of the prickly stubble and rough stones till our rosy-cheeked friend of seventeen summers showed us how it was done.

You stretch out your toes to smooth the way and the rest of your foot comes sliding after. Bunny was intensely interested—indeed, by the end of the afternoon, her fair head enveloped in a bright handkerchief, her sleeves rolled up, and reddened by the sun, she might have passed for a land-worker.

They fetched a splendid pair of horses from the stable, harnessed a *teliega*, piled so high with hay and straw that it was as soft and comfortable as a feather-bed, and dashed us off to the village. Here was no tumbledown decay, no quiescent hovels, and at the same time little trace of recent building. The houses, picturesque, solid, admirably constructed, had been made over after the War. The main street boasted a Catholic and a Greek Orthodox church, a really attractive Co-operative Store, a post-office, and a big school with a large parish room attached.

The school, very up-to-date, had only lately been completed. The previous building, grown too small, was now given over to what we should call a women's institute, where adult classes, lectures, and entertainments are arranged. The school-house rooms were on

the latest lines, with desks suited to young spines, large windows, and whitewashed walls—with the inevitable Lenin from swaddling-clothes to bald-headed greatness. There was a laboratory fitted with scientific apparatus, articulated skeletons, and botanical charts, and the headmaster, looking curiously like Turgeniev, told us he had ambitions for a contemporary art-gallery, a reference library, and a museum.

The whole village is wired for electricity, and the parish room has a large radio. But though the loud-speaker blares every night and morning, light and power have yet to come. They are waiting, like White Russia, till next year, when, according to the schedule, power-stations will be erected all over the U.S.S.R., and vast grids will be in working order.

The houses are comfortable, clean, and really cosy, with marvellous *kelims* and bright shawls.

"If you had come on Sunday," said Olga, our little peasant girl, "you would have seen us in our best. I have an orange-and-green striped skirt and a bright blue blouse. We all wear pretty things on the day we are not working."

At the end of the main street we came to a huge orchard, originally part of the local count's estate; it is now included in Sparta, but though the trees were laden with fruit—pears, plums, apples, and apricots—the gates were not locked. If the children like an apple they pick one up. Why not? But nobody takes more than is wanted, and the beautiful old place, with its moss-grown walks and sunny walls, huge trees and slender saplings, remains the pride and

possession of the countryside. It is cared for by agricultural experts—two young men in this case almost due for their final examination. They have crossed and recrossed every kind of pear, and can call on the most remote variety of apple each by its name. They loaded us with fruit, and as we munched Miranda brought toward us one of the plumpest, most sparkling little women you can think of. She wore a khaki raincoat and skirt, but round her head she had a marvellous yellow scarf which lit up her face, and, indeed, the landscape. She was irresistibly like our own Margaret Bondfield, who, I hope, will not think us lacking in respect in that we immediately dubbed the little woman 'Maggie.'

A women's organizer for a huge district, she had to travel about from Dan to Beersheba, inspecting tenements, reporting as to health, arranging lectures, and incidentally finding out the married troubles of one, the love complications of another, the domestic and industrial difficulties of all her flock. She was the widow of an engine-driver, killed in an accident, and after her husband's death, when the children were off her hands, had set to work to study arithmetic, going on to economics, sanitation, and generally equipping herself for social service. An amazing person, she had been at her job five years, and had the whole of feminist activities at her finger-ends. Moreover—and this appealed intensely to both of us—she bubbled with humour and had an eye for the comic side of everything. She was bearing a huge leather wallet, bursting with documents, but at the prospect

of a discussion as to women's work in England the wallet went to the winds.

Miranda picked it up and put it safely in the *teliega*, and Maggie immediately opened fire. She had a remarkable knowledge of social and economic conditions in Europe generally, and asked me the most searching questions as to our disabilities under a capitalist state. She was surprised, and, I think, a little jealous, that poor old benighted England had a woman Cabinet Minister, especially when she heard that Miss Bondfield did not come from the aristocratic class, but countered with the information that Soviet diplomacy, unlike English, included female *attachés*. She was especially interesting on the vexed question of marriage and divorce.

"At first the novelty of the new laws made many people do foolish things," she said. "They knew it was only necessary to register either to take a husband or to drop him, and the men could do the same with a wife. So it would happen that a couple would get married to-day, quarrel to-morrow, and get divorced the day after, and then perhaps marry afresh before the end of the week. But now things are calmer and more ordinary.

"You see, our Government has also passed a law by which a man must set aside one-third of what he earns for his children, if he is not living with their mother. But even if he marries three times and has three separate families the amount is never increased above the one-third. You can imagine what happens when, in the same village, women start quarrelling

over the distribution of the money. So many cases were brought to the court that it became a scandal. Now in a village every one knows everybody's business, and as soon as gossip reports that So-and-so is walking out with some one else's husband there is a dreadful commotion. Men like a quiet life, you know, and so to-day married couples for the most part stay married, unless there is some real reason—drink, crime, cruelty, or bad temper—for them to part. Men find it pays them better to be faithful."

"And if a child is illegitimate who supports it?" I asked.

She chuckled triumphantly. "There is no such thing as illegitimacy in the U.S.S.R. A child is registered in the same way, marriage or no marriage, and becomes a citizen of the State. Many women prefer to keep their maiden names, and few of us wear a wedding-ring. After all, because we love we are no less individuals. Also the father has to support an illegitimate child or children to the third of his income. But this also gave rise to a terrible scandal. The men were always busy trying to prove that they were not the father, and the whole thing became impossible. Now we have gone back to the normal. There are still affairs, but they are generally arranged peaceably."

"And what about the cities?" I asked.

"The cities are always different," she answered. "I only know the countryside, where things are simpler, cleaner, and people have less time to think about themselves."

She should, she explained, have gone on to the next village that afternoon, but, yielding to the distraction of further talk, she bundled into the *teliega*, her yellow scarf streaming in the breeze. We did not return to the farmhouse, but inspected the new flats in process of construction some distance away. Most of our friends had come along to meet us, however—Columbus, Olga, the doctor of the district, and a fine-looking man, the previous head of the communa, who, his term of office over, cheerfully took orders from his successor.

The flats, well built and commodious, had already been earmarked by young couples who wished to live on the communa instead of lodging in the village. When complete there was to be a recreation-room, a wireless, and other attractions, but the communal dining-hall would still remain at the old homestead.

It was, Miranda said, almost time to go—she still had hopes of a punctual train; but Columbus desired attention. He wished to speak about economics, and speak he did.

I am not too bad a hand on the questions of production, distribution, and consumption, but I had to be extremely alert to keep up with him. He did not debate the advantage of Communism over Capitalism; his inquiries were far more personal.

“Do the English proletariat earn sufficient wages to secure a decent standard of life?”

“Oh, yes,” I said, generalizing fatally; to which he countered:

“Why, then, did the miners strike?”

It was a palpable hit, mitigated slightly by my argument that the dispute concerned hours as well as wages. But, all the same, I felt that the Communist had scored quite heavily.

The next question pointed the immense gulf between England and the rest of Europe.

"What is the condition of the peasants? Do they work their land individually or co-operatively?"

"Alas! we have no peasants," I admitted. The statement staggered him, as it did the schoolmaster of White Russia.

"Only Kulaks?"

"Only Kulaks," I replied. "Only the farmer," and hastily trotted out our minimum agricultural wage.

But this did not interest him. He could not fathom a country so utterly devoid of what to him was an essential national root. It was fantastic not to have a peasantry. He was intrigued to hear that we had social clinics at our factories, but was not convinced that they were up to Soviet form, and, though unemployment pay assuaged his sense of justice, his simple Slavonic mind could not make out why there should be so many workless with roads to make, land to till, houses to build, and thousands of feet to be shod!

From England we turned to the communa. He told us that the household expenditure, as apart from the replenishment of agricultural stock, etc., was decided by public feeling. Mass meetings are held every month, and all questions of public and domestic policy are settled by vote.

"Some like cigarettes, others prefer vodka. It is

a matter of arrangement. So long as we keep within our income we can get what all of us prefer, and of course we all can add what we wish out of our dividends." I should here point out that what the manager told us was in line with the pamphlets on Collectivization which we brought home.

We left him standing, erect and conquering, under a grey-blue sky.

Madame Commissar—to give Maggie her correct title—came with us to the station, and waited for half an hour while we discussed the probable non-arrival of the train. She kissed us when she left, in the hope that we might some day meet again. I have never known a more friendly, more understanding soul or a keener brain, and I wished that in the future she might be co-opted for the Kremlin service. But I fear that is impossible. Like Jean, she belongs to the army of workers who centre themselves in their immediate fellows, so that the local problems, fears, and hopes become so irretrievably a part of their environment that nothing can transplant them. . . .

"It is stuffy in this waiting-room," said Bunny, munching an apple. "Let us go on to the platform."

"Moreover, it is going to rain," said Miranda, and we put on our mackintoshes. And with the assumption of these garments there opened another chapter of our venture, deeply feminine and refreshingly absurd.

Chapter XI

CONCERNING FEMININE VANITIES

THE platform was unusually deserted; the trippers were not yet due to return, and there was little local traffic. One or two peasants looked intently at us as we passed, and presently moved up to inspect at closer quarters, being joined by friends and neighbours who gathered round our seat. The women, matrons for the most part, were exceptionally handsome, their clothes, of the usual shabbiness, redeemed by touches of embroidery on their blouses, a coloured handkerchief on the neck or round the hair. They turned their eyes intently on our mackintoshes, *crêpe de Chine* in brown and blue, and were so obviously curious that Miranda grew a little concerned.

"I hope you don't mind being inspected," she said. "You see, they've never met any coloured waterproofs before."

We assured her of our complacency, and presently one of the group came up to us and asked Miranda all about them.

"So! They keep out the rain?" the woman repeated. "But it is very interesting; they are quite beautiful."

She showed us her husband's coat, the old ulster of her friend, the threadbare khaki of her own skirt, contrasting them by signs and motions with our garments.

CONCERNING FEMININE VANITIES

"Do all the women in England have coats like that?"

"Most of them," we said hopefully.

"The workers?"

"Most certainly the workers. The coats are made in every colour. Some of them are red."

"Do they cost a great deal of money?"

We translated the price into Soviet currency.

"Eight roubles [approximately one pound]."

"Eight roubles!" She threw up her hands, and in a torrent of eloquence broke the news to everybody within earshot.

It was incredible! Such lovely coats would cost a hundred times as much in Russia. They could not, indeed, be bought for love or money in the Ukraine or in any portion of the U.S.S.R. Why not?

The woman had a clever face, keen eyes, and a firm chin. She wore amber beads and a ruby ring, and must, I felt, come of a Communist family devoid of all Soviet reproach, otherwise she would not have sported such adornments.

We supposed that Russia did not manufacture mackintoshes.

"But," she was insistent, "England does. Tell us"—she fixed Miranda firmly—"why must we not have these nice coats; why can we not buy them?"

"Our Government only imports machinery," said Miranda gravely.

"But they are so cheap. We could all afford eight roubles." The other women grew excited, and the men looked sheepish. It was evident that they were being

tackled as to Soviet tyranny in repudiating coloured mackintoshes!

"Could they not be sent from England? We would pay the money for the carriage."

The situation was getting tense. Miranda felt that she must cope with it.

"It is forbidden to import in bulk," she said. "Our Government does not wish us to spend our money on foreign manufacture."

"Then why don't we manufacture?"

"We do. But all we make is wanted for the export trade that we may buy tractors."

The good-looking woman replied by something that I recognized as the Russian equivalent of "Damn." Her companions giggled—the men looked perturbed.

"But then"—I tried to pour a little oil upon the tempest—"but then in England we cannot get those lovely shirts," and I pointed to a particularly beautiful specimen embroidered in blue silk worn by a handsome peasant with curly hair.

"If you will give me your husband's shirt," I suggested to the comely matron, "I will give you my mackintosh."

In a flash she wheeled round, but, alas! the man in question was not her property, and when her eye lit on her husband it was to find that he was wearing a shirt plain as a pike-staff. She was so flaming with anger that I thought she would slap his face, but with the quick sense of fun that bubbles up so suddenly in the Russian she saw the humour of her rage and began to laugh.

CONCERNING FEMININE VANITIES

"You must not give the mackintosh to her," cautioned Miranda. "It would make great jealousy and stir up discontent. I have never seen such excitement over clothes before."

There followed a heated argument as to which of our two garments was the more attractive—Bunny's blue or my golden brown. From mackintoshes they got on to stockings, frocks, and shoes. It was a positive orgy of femininity, and I felt as though we had become a sort of bargain basement with everything at a reduced price. It was useless to remind them that their handkerchiefs, in glowing greens and soft orange, were quite charming. They had so long been starved of vanity that the flood-gates were loosed. It had been matter of pride as of custom usually to regard foreign women as mere fribbles, who put their own desires before the need of tractors and other national necessities. But now, for the first time, they began to feel a little sorry for themselves.

Miranda waited with consummate tact till the questions and the chatterings were exhausted. Then, so to speak, she took the field or the chair, and, as we gathered, delivered an address which might have been transmitted straight from Stalin.

"What did a mackintosh matter compared with the fate of Soviet Russia? Did they not know how hard the fight must be if the people were not to be defeated? Comrades, patriots, fellow-workers, followers of the Soviet, remember that if the Five Years Plan goes through in a very little while we shall have everything we want. Until then we must go short of many things

—luxuries, comfort. But what do they count In the name of Communism stand together.”

The crowd reacted and according to custom applauded and calmed down, but the woman of the gleaming eyes was still irreconcilable, and as she left she laid a lingering hand, like a caress, upon my sleeve. My last glimpse of her was in pursuit of the husband who had so untimely failed her in the choice of his shirt.

Dusk had fallen, the wind dropped, the lights in the distant farmsteads twinkled in tiny flames. We sat and waited.

We were the only passengers to get aboard when eventually the train arrived, but every seat was full, piled high to the ceiling, packed down to the floor. The Russian, however, can be unbelievably plastic, and, though the seats were already occupied half a dozen times, by dint of overlapping their bundles and folding up their bodies they found room for us to squeeze in.

Everybody seemed to be carrying huge bouquets of field flowers and foliage, big bags of apples rolled about, pears were squashed, and some of the children were munching small, sweet plums like damsons. The crowd was happy, laughing, and very few fell asleep. At every station more passengers got in and the others folded closer, until we were wedged more tightly than the most compressed sardines. I expected the poor Rabbit would be badly bitten, but hard seats are usually exempt from verminous small fry. It is in the soft seats that you find them, which, after all, may be the economic penalty exacted for superior travelling.

CO CERNING FEMININE VANITIES

It was long past ten when we arrived at Kiev, to find enormous queues lined up outside the station for trams and motor-buses, with no hint of either in sight.

Miranda told us that her mother was getting on the train three stations before Kiev, but so dense was the crowd that it was impossible to pick out any individual. As Bunny said, even a magnet would have been powerless to attract steel in that squash.

The summer seemed suddenly to have closed up. The air was cold, and a cruel, a tigerish wind had leapt down from the north. It was ever so mild a foretaste of that winter which, like a thief in the night, falls on the south.

We shivered bodily in our mackintoshes, and shuddered inwardly, remembering all the millions bare-foot and in rags. How would they meet the snow and ice that was to come?

I was assured that, with the first beginnings of the change, tickets would be issued for boots, overcoats, and sheepskins, though I had my doubts as to what extent the Kremlin would depreciate their export trade. But however the cities may suffer, the countryside will hold its own, and from their hidden stores every peasant, man and woman, will produce some kind of winter covering, some sort of footwear. But I do not like to think of the little provincial towns in the winter. Poor Minsk!

We tailed on to the queue, and calculated that, with luck, we might secure a seat on the third or fourth bus to arrive. But after twenty minutes' waiting No. 2 had not turned up, and I began to wonder if we ought to

have a droshky. But the brigands had all gone home—there are few fares from local trains—and we were too desperately tired and chilled to walk. So there was nothing for it but to stand and shake.

The third omnibus created a diversion. In the first place, Miranda's mother miraculously arrived. A very charming lady who had accommodated herself to the exigencies of the new *régime* and seemed quite happy. In the second, some one tried to break an unwritten law.

Now it is enacted that each bus must discharge its cargo at the terminus before taking up a fresh load at another point. When, however, No. 3 arrived a young woman midway in our queue rushed out, boarded the bus, and seized on the first seat vacated.

The queue murmured their disapproval. It wasn't fair play, and the conductress—a pretty little piece of goods well under five feet—took immediate action. No sooner was the bus at the starting-point than she put up her hand, stopped the oncoming stream, and told the rule-breaker that she must get out.

Not a bit of it. "I am here and I remain!" And she invited the other to eject her. The tussle would obviously have been one-sided, but the conductress was not through yet. She summoned the driver to reinforce her. But he was equally inoperative. Madame the intruder merely sat tight, while the crowd rallied to the conductress with friendly shouts. Then authority blew a tiny blast upon her whistle.

"The police!" said Bunny, and excitedly held her breath. Now at last we should see the Soviet in

CONCERNING FEMININE VANITIES

action. The woman would obviously be dragged forth, probably be knouted, most certainly sent to Siberia. It was unthinkable that the OGPU should allow her to flout the people and live!

Again the whistle blew, the slogan sounded thrice, but nothing happened. Soviet policemen, like their English brethren, are rarely to be found when wanted. A further and a shriller warning brought a young man leisurely walking from the station in a khaki uniform and a green cap. He was by no means eager to interfere, and showed every disposition to remain passive, except that he took copious notes. The conductress, however, strengthened by the presence of the law, talked no further, but, hurling herself on the passenger like a stone from a catapult, dislodged her and, fighting fiercely, finally threw her out. We all cheered and laughed and trooped toward the bus, the miscreant, by consensus of opinion, being sent to the extreme end of the queue. She was not cast down, however, but told her tale to right and left, demanded sympathy, and threatened proceedings. We might, I felt, have been in the Brixton Road.

We found the Continental abuzz with fresh arrivals. A contingent from Moscow had turned up, and there was trouble over one of the bookings.

A tired, good-looking Russian girl was wrestling with the clerk, translating as she went to one of those neat, compact, inscrutable little people who travel all over the world without modifying an iota of their likes and dislikes—untouchable, unmalleable to the end. The variety with small difference is usually either English or

American. In this case it was American; slight, erect, in a severe grey tailor-made and a stiff-brimmed hat, she remained impervious to everything but what she wanted. She had booked a room for herself and a room for her guide, and another room was wanted for an arrival expected from Leningrad—who was bringing a cat!

The first two requirements were to hand—the third was impossible. The hotel was full to overflowing. Finally she agreed to allow her guide—the good-looking young woman—to share her room, but the cat was to sleep in solitary state with its chaperon.

“It is a Persian cat,” explained the lady with decision. “I propose to take it home with me to the United States. It does not get sufficient meat over here. I have already spent a large sum of money providing for his needs.”

Meanwhile neither the cat nor the chaperon had turned up, so the lady retired, leaving the guide, dropping with fatigue, to await the feline’s coming. Presently she sat down by us, and we got into conversation. Her English was not fluent, but quite serviceable. She had been the American woman’s guide for a whole month at five pounds a day—payable to the State. Madame, it seemed, was connected with the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and was concerned to rescue and redeem spavined horses, lame cows, starving dogs, and stray cats. Her interest appeared to centre in animal—rather than human-kind, and when she went to Leningrad her first thought had been for the suffering tabbies of the short-rationed

CONCERNING FEMININE VANITIES

capital. At a cats' clinic she encountered a small girl with a Persian, waiting for the lethal chamber. The family could not afford to feed it, and if they had the money they could not always get the food, for such was the delicacy of the animal that meat and meat only would it have.

The heart of the grey lady went out in a huge bound. She endowed the child with a prodigious number of roubles, sufficient, indeed, to feed six people, let alone one cat, and arranged to buy the peerless creature as soon as she could fix up its transport.

"She has kept on and on about the cat until my head aches and my ears split. And now we come here and she arranges for the owner to bring the animal and stay the night. And I ask for rooms. But there are only two, and I think surely she will let the cat sleep with her, so that I can have a little rest all to myself. But it is always the cat first, the human creature nowhere. And so I stay up while the cat lies down. For there will be no rest in the room with her."

The guide looked terribly done up, and I almost wished the wretched Persian would die before it got there. But before the grey lady's will empires would fall, let alone felines, and I knew that inevitably the unfortunate girl would spend a sleepless night and have to bear the brunt of the Persian's non-appearance the next morning. From what I gathered, the whole of the Russian tour, entailing a large amount of money, had centred on the animal. Not for the grey lady the surprises, contrasts, emotional crises of the new, as

opposed to the old, Russia. She had fastened on one thing and one alone—the cat.

It is always a puzzle and a fascination to me as to why these self-centred individuals should desire to travel. They carry with them their own environment, to which they insistently conform. They see only with the eyes of their normal existence, measure with the determined opinions of their everyday life, and return, generally speaking, an authority on the discomforts of the countries they have visited, without any comprehension of the peoples.

“Experience,” said Bernard Shaw, “is a matter of capacity.” Which I suppose explains why there are some people who travel all over the earth and do not interiorly know one place from another, let alone the significance of their own home town.

The cat and its owner arrived early the next morning, but the saga of the Persian still continued. We used to ask after his health when we met the grey lady on the stairs, sympathize as to the lack of pheasant and other succulent game, tenderly inquire if he could digest mice and similar small fry. The whole hotel seemed to centre round Cyrus. It was amazing the dynamic energy his frail little mistress generated in the fight to get her pet delicate fare. Her perpetual plaint incited the guide to drive through the porter’s lethargy, the booking-clerk’s deliberation, until the word *saychass* was eliminated from their vocabulary.

Generally speaking, feeling was not on the lady’s side. Were there no orphans whom she might have

CONCERNING FEMININE VANITIES

endowed? Were there no families to whom a meal of meat would have appeared as manna?

Meantime she was busy arranging the cat's migration. It was necessary to obtain permission from the Soviet to remove this valuable specimen—even though it was not an antique and had been rescued from the lethal chamber. Next it became essential to get the consent of the Polish Ministry of Agriculture to allow the animal to place its imperial paws upon their ground. This was not all. The grey lady was travelling to Hamburg, and so Germany's visa was also necessary, with the possible consent of Denmark, as the cat and its protector might make a flying visit to Copenhagen. Added to which, there would be periods of quarantine, while a long dietetic programme stretched ahead. The little guide was all but demented, and tramped from pillar to post, post to pillar, in a vain attempt to bring all the divergent governments into line. She earned her money, that poor girl!

I suggested to the grey lady, in a regrettable spirit of frivolity, that Cyrus might go Bolshevist *en route* and decline to leave the U.S.S.R. But my remarks did not impress her. She continued her own resistless way, until the combined efforts of six embassies made her realize that it would take at least three months to fix up negotiations.

And then she turned her wrath upon the city of Kiev. If she could not take Cyrus, she would not leave him save under suitable protection. Why was there not a home for cats in this preposterous place of 600,000 inhabitants?

And forthwith there started an excited pilgrimage to discover if in the whole of the city there was anyone worthy and capable of taking Cyrus.

Meanwhile we extended our excursions, visiting comunas and villages and making friends with peasants. We also discovered a marvellous little tea-shop, the only one of its kind we had encountered. Within a stone's throw of the Continental we found a place furnished with small tables neatly spread, where cakes, white bread, and glasses of tea were served at a reasonable figure. Moreover, there were sweets on sale—chocolates, fruit jellies, toffees, and acid-drops. The cakes were a little like bran, due, I suppose, to the restricted use of any kind of cooking fat, and the candies suggested glucose rather than sugar. But it was pleasing to find the place in full swing and obviously well patronized, professional men and women and Government clerks flocking in. We could have found interest and amusement in an extended exploration, but the time had come for us to realize that our stay in Russia must end. Money was dwindling. It became essential to arrange for our departure.

It was, however, rather a shock when Miranda told us that before we could leave the U.S.S.R. we should have to pay £2 10s. apiece for permission to do so. Moreover, we should need further photographs. And as these things would take a long time to arrange, she advised us to put matters in train as soon as possible.

We dutifully inquired for the Foreign Office, where visas are dispensed, and put in an appearance at the building where the Foreign Secretary had his head-

quarters. He was not there. He had gone to Moscow, and no one in the office had any power to deal with our request.

We were not surprised. The whole thing was only a repetition of what happened in London, only we did not want to wait so long for the permission to go out of Russia as we had for the right to come in.

"Presently we shall be sent to quite another place," said Bunny, and the sequel proved her correct.

It was Miranda who next day put us on the right track.

"You had much better put your application through the office of Intourist. You can, of course, get a visa without their help, but it would take a long time, and they deal with these matters continually."

We followed her advice, and the whole thing was simplified. We signed a paper, handed over the cash, and Miranda's charm and *savoir faire* imbued Spideree with geniality and politeness.

"Had we booked our tickets to Mohylandy?"—the frontier town on the Ukraine border.

We had not, so Spideree said he would do it for us, and also arrange for the motor-bus to take us to the station for a small fee.

We paid up, looked cheerful, and accepted the invitation to look inside the Intourist shop, with exhibits of ancient and modern art. The window was beautifully arranged; it was, indeed, the only one worth looking at in Kiev, except the little pastry-cook's at the corner. We could have bought ikons, Cossack caps, marvellous coats stiff with gold embroidery, cigarette-cases made

of birch, leather belts tooled to perfection, women's head-dresses in silver filigree, coloured handkerchiefs, peasant costumes, even cigarettes—all the spoils of the old *régime*, the first-fruits of the new. We admired, but we could not purchase; the exchange was too ruinously against us.

The next item was to get photographed. Miranda, as usual, was our guardian angel, and introduced us to a funny little shop run by an old man and his wife. The walls were covered with the usual cabinet pictures—wedding-parties, engaged couples, babies and actresses, poetic young men and starry-eyed young women, with congress delegates and commissars galore. He did his work quickly and well, and produced, while we waited, very creditable likenesses at a cost of eight roubles for the two. His usual charge was one rouble fifty, but he considered himself entitled to take toll of the foreigner, and there was no reason, legal or social, why he should not, though Miranda was a little hurt at what she regarded as cupidity.

It is only at these one-man shows that payments ever vary. The figures in the Co-operative Stores all over the country are set, no matter who the purchaser. But in the open market you must haggle.

From the photographers we went on to the fruit-stalls. Kiev has a pleasant market-place, with an air of bustle and an interchange of chaff missing from some of the other towns. But that morning it was not at all cheery. The wind had blown clouds of dust over the stalls, feebly protected by sheets of newspaper. It was beginning to rain, and already the peasants

CONCERNING FEMININE VANITIES

were packing up to go home, but we were able to buy pears at a rouble a Russian pound—equal to two of ours—though it was the sort of day when even in August fruit does not appeal, and you long for a cosy fire and a hot dinner. We comforted ourselves, however, with the thought of the ample Polish fare which in a few days we should enjoy over the border, and tried to pretend that we looked forward to another vegetarian lunch.

Alas, the weather was against us, or rather me!

I am one of those unhappy creatures who physically and mentally shrink in the cold, and the icy blast, keen as the sword of death, had devastated me. I walked along the Worovsky gradually growing numb, my hands totally without feeling.

And then, looking down, I made a dreadful discovery. My fingers, as though under an evil spell, had contracted.

"Bunny," I said in a hoarse whisper, "I've dropped my wedding-ring!"

Now I have a reputation for losing every kind of impedimenta, for which reason Bunny always carried the cash, the passports, and other documents. But on this journey I had been more careful or more fortunate until that morning.

"It's impossible," said Bunny. "Even you couldn't lose that."

But so it was, and I gazed, transfused with disbelief, at my third finger, wondering what could have happened.

"You did not leave it at the hotel?"

"No," interrupted Miranda, gazing wildly round, she was wearing it at the photographer's."

At this moment we became conscious of intense excitement a short way down the street. Women were running, men shouting; people craned from the tops of trams and motor-buses. In the midst of the agitation Miranda started running at top speed, Bunny in pursuit.

I did not run. I was held by an awful fear, the sort of nightmare terror that haunts you in a dream, utterly fantastic, perfectly unreal. I was suddenly conscious that certain of my undergarments had given way, the elastic had snapped, and, yes, already the edges, fortunately dark brown, were visible beneath my skirt. I was rooted to the spot. The situation was past coping with. In a London street, embarrassing as it might be, one could have whipped into a shop, or behind a pillar-box, and made a suitable adjustment.

But here, in a Russian city, surrounded by alien eyes, it was a different matter. Besides, where could I go? Gazing round in desperation, I saw a newspaper kiosk up a side-street, and made straight for it, clutching at my garments, praying that they would not descend wholly about my feet. But I was already the focus of acute attention; the crowd, Miranda at the head, was returning, literally galloping over the pavement. I was pursued by cries, challenged by waving arms, but still I held on my way, and with a desperate spurt reached comparative safety, still clutching urgently.

At this moment Miranda breathlessly gave me back

CONCERNING FEMININE VANITIES

my ring. It had rolled into the gutter, she explained; a woman had seen the sparkle of the gold and picked it up.

"But what is the matter?" she said, suddenly aware of my hunted look.

"My knickers have gone," I answered. It was all I could say.

The effect was electrical. Bunny, literally seething with wrath, descended on me, and Miranda threw up her hands.

"Aha!" she said. "It is symbolic. Things are like that in Russia. You lose your ring and the respectability goes too."

Desperately holding on to the escaping garments, I inquired if the finder of the ring would accept a reward.

Miranda shook her head. "It is bad luck for anyone to make money from a wedding-ring," she said. "Not even the biggest thief would steal it. You see, in Russia we are still superstitious, or shall I say prophetic?" and she laughed provocatively.

We were congratulated by the crowd. I shook hands, with difficulty, with half a dozen people, and, a little dazed and very cold, I walked between the others toward the hotel. By this time I was conscious that I was very wet, and that the rain, pelting heavily, had disintegrated the newspaper in which the pears were wrapped. At any moment their collapse upon the pavement was imminent. But I told myself there was a chance it might hold out, and I simply dared not create a further diversion.

But the third misfortune had to happen. Suddenly

the paper gave, and Miranda and Bunny—for obvious reasons I could not assist them—started groping around in the mud and rain for the escaped fruit.

I was for leaving the wretched things where they lay—we had nothing to carry them in—but Bunny by this time had passed the limit of patience, and, as in my defenceless state she could not vent her wrath on me, she unloaded it on the pears, and, picking them up in concentrated fury, she snapped her umbrella shut and popped them inside! And so, bearing the umbrella—our only one—bulging with the unfortunate fruit, our heads and shoulders unprotected from the wet, we staggered to the Continental. I was never more glad of the privacy of a room!

Downstairs we learned the latest developments in regard to Cyrus. The grey lady had succeeded in planting the Persian with a Professor of Philosophy at the Kiev University who, she was confident, would at once understand the soul and study the digestion of the animal. We gathered that she was paying a considerable sum for the board and lodging—especially for the board—and we wondered rather impishly whether the cat might die of overfeeding.

But news of our visas for the moment crowded out our interest in Cyrus. They were ready, waiting for us at the desk. The incredible dispatch amazed us; but thereby hangs a tale.

Some few hours later we met the grey lady in the vestibule, seething with quiet, cold anger.

“I understand you have arranged your passports?” she said icily.

CONCERNING FEMININE VANITIES

"Oh, yes"—we waved them at her joyously—"we had them some time ago."

"You are fortunate. I have only now gotten mine."

"What a pity!" I said a little nervously. I felt somehow she wanted to join battle.

"I went with my guide to the passport office, though I particularly wanted to visit Cyrus, but as the office was so near I agreed to go there first. It was not yet ten when we arrived. It is now five."

"That's too bad," said Bunny. "But it's all right now."

She swept the assuagement aside. "My guide was otherwise engaged." Her eyes induced a sudden sense of apprehension. "While I was waiting for my visa she was obviously getting *yours*."

"But how kind of her!" I said impulsively.

"Most," she said bitterly. "She got all the necessary signatures both for you and your friend, and, I gather, dispatched them back here for you. Meanwhile I remained. I am aware that certain formalities connected with my departure delayed my visa, but, after all, I paid her for her time. She had no right to give you any of it."

"We didn't see her," I said, stammering. "The documents were left in charge of the porter."

"So I have discovered. Are you aware of any reason why a guide retained by one person should concern herself with others?"

Had she paused for an answer I should have done something desperate—probably offered her eight roubles on account! But she was too full of grievance to wait.

"And meanwhile I have not seen Cyrus; I do not even know if he has taken kindly to his home, which means that I shall have to call round later this evening and spend the whole night packing my trunks."

The grey lady disappeared like a wrathful shadow up the staircase. We fell back and encountered the defiant guide, obviously in for a hectic night. We thanked her in dumb show for what she had done, whispered an invitation to tea at the pastry-cook's if she could escape, and stole off like two naughty children. The indomitable daughter of New England had succeeded where all the Ogpus of the Soviet had failed—we literally trembled.

"Imagine, we may have to travel with her!" said Bunny.

"We needn't go into the same carriage," I answered.

"You'll see," said Bunny grimly. "She'll insist on joining us as a mortification of the flesh. If I had been the guide I'd have poisoned Cyrus long ago."

Travelling is always a lengthy business in Russia. Days of preparation are needed where elsewhere only a few hours are required. There was a difficulty as to soft seats, Spideree informed us. There had been such a demand that we might have to wait until the day after the morrow.

"In that case," I said cheerfully, "we'll travel hard." And this although we had it on good authority that all trains which cross the frontier are free from insect pests! But at the thought of the commission Intourist would lose under such an arrangement Spideree woke up, battled on the telephone, and arranged our places.

CONCERNING FEMININE VANITIES

Finally we secured the tickets, but not until Miranda had called for them. I cannot forget her kindness and solicitude. She did us a hundred services, handling them lightly and gracefully as though they were flowers.

It was impossible to believe we were actually due to start the following morning.

We did our packing, drank our final glass of tea, and, excited but happy, realized it was our last evening in the U.S.S.R. I lived again each day with its special appeal, its intimate revelation, and I began to sort out my conclusions and my impressions, my thoughts and my discoveries, what I had felt and what I had seen.

Chapter XII

THE PENALTY OF INTELLECT

THE undercurrents of social life in the Soviet city make themselves curiously felt. For the proletariat it is comparatively plain sailing—the workman is not an object of general suspicion, and unless a wholesale charge of sabotage is levied against some special works, the rank and file remain fairly immune from sudden terrifying examination or arrest. So far for externals. Emotionally the worker, with the rest, is the object of the most intensive and reverberating propaganda in the world. He is keyed up to the last inch of his industrial powers, cut down to the narrowest limit of sheer necessities, and rationed strictly by ticket and opinion as to tobacco and drink. There are, I was informed, certain works where food and clothing are more lavishly distributed, but only with the view of keeping up the output to the index figure demanded by the Five Years Plan. The industrialist, however, has definite advantages over the Government clerk.

The older men in the Civil Service, whose youth goes back to a pre-Revolution Russia, no matter what their devotion or their assiduity to the Soviet cause, are always under unseen but uncomfortably felt espionage. You see the consciousness of this suspicion in their walk, their looks, their attitude. They are

THE PENALTY OF INTELLECT

aware that the least variation from the standardized existence may mark them down as counter-revolutionaries. Moreover, their class suffers materially as well as emotionally. Their housing assignments come last, after the workers have been satisfied; their day of rest is continually forfeit, a demand for volunteer service cutting short all prospect of even a few free hours.

An official of the Ukraine told me that he rarely got his scheduled leisure. There was generally a truck of potatoes to unload, a lost train to track, a shortage in the clerical staff of another department. Legally his class is entitled to a day off after every five, like the rest of the Russian world. But reference to the question of rights might precipitate a charge of slackness, with the disquieting prospect of imprisonment, or even death. The older Government officials are viewed with grudging mistrust, not only by the Ogpu, but by the community at large. When they were young their parents were able to send them to the university, an educational privilege which, before 1918, was denied the peasant and the worker, and although this advantage enabled them quickly and effectively to serve the State and form the nucleus of the civil administration, it will not be forgiven them until universal schooling has swept away the last illiterate in the farthest corner of the U.S.S.R.

This attitude of mind does not seem to me inexplicable. The Russians are at once a mystic and a realist nation. They argue that the burden of ignorance and ignominy carried for centuries by the less

favoured millions calls for a reckoning which the descendants of the privileged few must necessarily bear. It is at the worst a symptom rather than an integral part of Russian Socialism, though none the less oppressive for its victims.

A more imminent point is exactly how this attitude is likely to affect the civil servants recruited from those millions of young people who, as children of the Revolution, have no recollection of any system before the inauguration of the Soviet State. They work like horses, flinging their day of rest on the pile of devotion as a man casts a rose at his lady's feet. But after the age of twenty-four or twenty-five, when the first stress of fervour has abated, they are brought up against certain uncomfortable facts. No matter what their qualifications, in the financial scale their possible income falls heavily below the figure that the workman may reach. Moreover, the proletariat has been trained to think the brain-worker an inferior type, and as such to be regarded with hostility. Even in the case of the Young Communist Party, the shock troops of the U.S.S.R., this feeling militates, enforcing on the suspected parties a sense of isolation.

An official at the Kiev Board of Trade gave me some enlightening figures, which stress the divergence between the treatment of the clerical and the manual worker.

He was a man of marked intelligence, with a knowledge of European economics and affairs generally, and, I should say, administered his department with considerable skill. He was dressed in shabby

khaki trousers and an old but neatly mended khaki shirt. He told me he received 200 roubles a month, which in English money, at the Russian rate of exchange, works out at somewhere about £25. On the other hand, the skilled mechanic on piecework may earn from 250 to 300 roubles. There are practically no limits to what he can make if he chooses to work overtime and to put his back into the job. But, so I was told, throughout the Civil Service there is little chance of growing increment. A commissar and a member of the Central Soviet is paid 250 roubles. This finally adjusts the economic value of these two types in the eyes of the State. It does not seem to me, however, that this standard can ultimately continue. To begin with, if the Soviet educational plan succeeds, another generation—to quote a member of the Ukraine Executive Committee—may find every blacksmith a Doctor of Philosophy, each mechanic a Master of Arts! It is hoped and supposed that these individuals will attain their degrees by attendance at the universities; in which case, as I asked, who will till the earth or hammer iron? It seems to me that it is improbable on the face of things that men of letters, as a general rule, will content themselves with merely manual tasks, and that as education speeds up there will be a growing tendency to abandon the shops for the office.

The answer given me was that so long as the top rate for the artisan is higher than the top rate for the clerical worker, the majority will prefer to remain as manual operatives. I do not share this conviction, but,

in any case, with the increase of literary aspirations there must come a new evaluation of the intellect.

In the matter of food, labourers not unnaturally come first. Factory hands are rationed at 2 lb. of bread a day. The office worker receives 1 lb. a day only. Men engaged in extremely heavy work have an extra half-pound.

Meat, as we found for ourselves, is very rare. The shortage, I was officially told, would continue for the next three years. It was also admitted that in the spring of 1929, when Stalin launched his campaign for enforced Collectivization, the peasants all over the U.S.S.R. killed their beasts rather than hand them over without compensation. It is estimated that in some parts of the country 50 per cent. of all the bulls were slaughtered, and quite one-third of the sheep and goats and horned cattle. Pigs were also indiscriminately put to death, with cocks and hens, and in some places even horses. There followed a period of excessive meat-eating—the whole of Russia wallowed in the consumption of beef and pork. But they have paid for it since, and, as we discovered, only occasional suspicions of stewed cow flavour the universal cabbage soup.

“But,” said my informant, “when we are back to normal there will be plenty to spare. Already there are an enormous number of pig-farms in the Ukraine, as elsewhere, and on one centre alone 6000 heads are expected this year. The breeds have been crossed scientifically to suit all markets and the national palate.”

THE PENALTY OF INTELLECT

Meanwhile the poor intellectual—for the type is slowly creeping back—has little chance even of stewed cow. The workman, again, gets first call.

Butter is rarely seen, and, apart from export, is supposed to be reserved only for children, invalids, and old people. The same holds good of eggs. But these, however, as we found out, can be purchased in the open market at about sixpence each.

Attempts are being made to encourage a taste for Chinese beans, and already the Government have sown some 5000 hectars. For the most part, however, the people of the cities live on bread and tea and tea and bread, which may be described as the banners of the travelling millions that roam up and down the country.

House-room, as I have already said, is served first to the proletariat. The officials come off second best. My friend, with a wife and two children, paid 150 roubles a month for two rooms.

Apart from the Government clerk, the professional man is slightly better off. The best jobs are in the engineering world, though most of the constructive works—the big mines, electric plants, etc.—are under the management of American or German engineers, who draw large salaries, amounting to thousands of roubles a month, with good accommodation and unrestricted facilities for importing food to supplement the rations. They have under their control a number of Russian trainees who, however, receive little more than the men whom they have to overlook. There is already, I understand, some difficulty in getting

these trainees to take responsible positions. It is not only that the salary is small and the responsibility great, but the attitude of the manual worker toward the professional director induces friction, and the knowledge that though he gets a low salary he has to pay the full price of any delay in output, holds back enthusiasm and discourages enterprise.

But though they feel the social pressure, the discrepancy in the shops or the mines is nothing like so great as between the ordinary industrial employee and the civil servant. It is always in this department of public life that the seeds of political dissatisfaction first sprout. In every country the younger branches of permanent officialdom are quick to respond to revolutionary economics, and for this reason, as I see it, to keep the splendid and most sacrificial loyalty of its civil servants the U.S.S.R. will have to remit its standards of value, and both in prestige and pay give a higher place to the *intelligentsia*.

Soviet Russia is the country of perpetual growth. The ploughboy of to-day may be a chief accountant to-morrow, and with this continual reshuffling of occupation there must come an alteration in outlook. The left always moves toward the right, and this simple political fact, economically speaking, will have to be reckoned with in building up the future of the New Russia, who with such amazing strides is becoming suddenly strangely articulate.

There seems to be a growing urge among the younger lads toward engineering. It is the ambition of fifteen out of every twenty to go into the shops,

due in part to the Kremlin war-cry of "Machines, Machines," and the never-ending insistence of their immediate necessity if the Five Years Plan is to go through, but also to the legend current all over the country that Stalin himself was in the trade.

The mysticism of the Russian has incorporated this belief as an act of faith. No matter how you may argue as to the published facts and dates of the dictator's career, from the time he was entered as a novice at a monastery in Moscow to the day when he made his final escape from prison, nothing can uproot the myth. It owes existence to Lenin's *sobriquet* for the great man who was born Joseph Djugashvili. "But," said the Blood-red Shadow—as I have heard Lenin described—"he is a man of steel, and steel shall be his name." Henceforth the name 'Stalin' in Russian became fraught with the atmosphere of engineering works, and from conjuring up the vision of giant hammers, ferocious mills, gleaming and implacable engines, it became the trade-mark of their idol's calling. Stalin is, and I am sure will for ever remain, a mechanic in the eyes of millions of his countrymen.

Amid this universal worship of machinery the ordinary though essential Government clerk moves but dully. Not for him the special prize of a holiday at the Russian Riviera of the Black Sea, not for him special grants for boots and clothing, tobacco and tea. His amusements are as standardized as his work—the theatre, the film, both replete with propaganda which even the superb artistry of production cannot

wholly dim. The old, old story beats on the brain till it becomes almost atrophied, and only automatically reacts. Very occasionally is the strain lifted, when the classicists are revived, and Tchehov, Turgenev, Tolstoi, and Pushkin bloom once more upon the stage. There is no bar against these revivals, which are, however, presented from the angle of the past, and still cry injustice on the Tsarist *régime*. Hollywood also flourishes, and provides a somewhat Barmecidal feast for those who like to watch rich food and expensive garments! The public concerts, orchestral and by wireless, are magnificent, but here again you pay for every spoonful of the jam of enjoyment by a big proclamatory dose.

Next in popularity to engineering comes the medical profession, to which girls and boys alike are flocking. There is a huge demand for M.O.'s. Vast country districts are still insufficiently staffed, and village hospitals work shorthanded, both in the surgical and maternity wards. Throughout the length and breadth of that vast territory there is not one person unemployed save by choice. There are, of course, a large number of misfits, a great deal of wastage, the perpetual migration of labour from one area to another where better conditions prevail, but, making ample allowance for these contingencies, the fact emerges that Russia is ravenous for labour and will absorb more and more for years to come.

And when she has reached saturation-point at home, and the export markets can absorb no more, employment will still be universal, but for a shorter

THE PENALTY OF INTELLECT

number of hours per day. This possibility does not, I think, affect the general speeding up of the Five Years Plan. The necessary impetus is furnished by the whip and spur of propaganda, the illimitable wireless, and the persistent harrying by the Young Communists, who seize on a district and simply flog it with words, if not deeds.

I spoke to many people on the matter of forced labour, as distinct from political punishment in mines and timber reservations. They admitted that a number of peasants apart from Kulaks are coralled and transported to lumber-yards, but said that this aroused no general resistance. To reply that resistance would be futile does not take the facts of the situation into consideration. When the majority of the Russian people resist, the Kremlin gives way. This was clearly shown in the futile attempts at enforced Collectivization, when, as I have already said, the peasants burned their corn and slaughtered their beasts rather than hand them over to the community without compensation.

Sporadic defiance is instantaneously and effectively crushed, and while handfuls of the population put up a fight against industrial coercion nothing will happen. Once, however, the vast millions of land-workers are stirred, coercion goes by the board. Meanwhile the majority may grumble, but at the same time they acquiesce.

There are of necessity few lawyers in Russian commerce; industry has been absorbed by the State, and questions of property do not arise. The only

scope for legal activity, apart from State prosecutions, is in affiliation cases and those matrimonial disputes when two or more women claim the allotted third of a man's income in respect of their children. The writer and journalist, however, is in great demand. There are no limits to his possible income, and he may write for as many papers as will publish his stuff—the whole of the Press being State-owned. In the matter of ideas, viewpoints, or opinions, however, he is painfully restricted. Propaganda persists in every line—even the crime man flavours his stories with a revolutionary touch.

The Soviet, and nothing but the Soviet, is the journalistic slogan. Fancy can play on descriptive articles, but the fashion expert is unknown, for there is no fashion.

The novelist is equally restricted. Romance is practically at a discount, its only possible exploitation being the triumph of the Soviet disciple over a Russian of the old school, who, however, must inevitably be the villain. Thwarted passion between a mutually attracted pair has no sympathy in the U.S.S.R. The Registrar of Divorce and Marriage unties every knot, and the man who loves and can get no response is usually a figure of amusement. Humour still remains, and, with the bubbling sense of fun which breaks up the Russian melancholy as the spring sunshine dissolves the ice, the matrimonial laws are perpetually lampooned.

There is a good market for short stories, but novels are less easy to place. The fate of a book is decided

by the Soviet Publishing Boards, to whom all manuscripts must be submitted. The theme rather than the writing is the chief consideration, and anything that detracts from the paramount importance of the Government over individual interests is not likely to win out on æsthetic value. If the Board turns down a book no other market is available. One firm's refusal may mean another's consent in other countries; in Russia the Soviet's decision is final! The author must try again.

The same applies to plays or film stories. A Government Board approves, or the reverse; there is no second chance.

On the other hand, the author receives his royalties punctually, and there is no restriction on his receipts. But, like the journalist, there is little he can do with money, however much he earns, except invest it in Soviet loans, and even then he must not have too large a balance in the bank. It is not advisable, I was told, to have more than a thousand roubles to your immediate credit. Hoarding is a criminal offence, and in the case of 'coins' liable to the extreme penalty.

There remains only vodka, tobacco, books, railway-travelling, and such articles of clothing as you are lucky enough to get permission to buy. If you import a coat, boots, or any article of wearing apparel, the duty is so heavy that it is cheaper to wait your turn for home-made goods or go without.

Books, however, remain an avenue for expenditure with which the State does not interfere. All the

famous Russian authors can be bought in cheap editions, with the most popular European and American. There is no copyright in the U.S.S.R., and the translations are, every one, pirated, so that best-sellers add large sums to the Soviet exchequer year after year. Wherever we went we found our Wallace; crooks and sleuths have a fundamental attraction quite apart from politics, and Ogpus, commissars, peasants, and workers all consume the one and only Edgar.

Bernard Shaw, Hugh Walpole, John Galsworthy, Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, all the literary giants, are well represented. G. K. C. is also very popular, with H. G. Wells.

"But," I said, surprised, "G. K. is anti-Communist."

"Oh, yes," was the smiling answer, "but then he is anti-Capitalist as well."

Children's books as such are not a feature of Russian literature. Fairy-tales of all descriptions are taboo, as being dangerously near religious topics! Fabulous creatures of the imagination, elves or angels, magicians or prophets, are held in grave suspicion. The young mind must not be tampered with. The dawning intelligence may not be warped with foolish legends like *Jack the Giant-killer* or *The Sleeping Beauty*. Life for the little ones must be real and earnest, and woe to the man or woman who shall turn the babes and sucklings from the consideration of tractors, aeroplanes, or the vital necessity of the Five Years Plan!

THE PENALTY OF INTELLECT

We were waiting on one occasion for an errant train, surrounded by massed humanity profoundly sleeping. In a spirit of frivolity I suggested to Miranda a possible reason for the general disruption of the railways.

"To me it is quite obvious," I said, "that the trains have formed a Soviet and have elected a special locomotive as their commissar. Only when the engine gives the signal will the train run. At the moment he must be sleeping!"

Miranda leaned forward and laid an impressive hand upon my arm.

"It is a good thing for you, my friend," she said, "that you speak in English. Had you said that in Russian it might not have been so well. You have just told a fairy-tale, and fairy-tales are forbidden by law."

Art also is controlled! Complete standardization is the Soviet's ultimate scheme. At present it is still in the making. There is a plan on foot by which the cleverest painters and designers are to express Government ideals according to their particular vision. Once registered, however, these individual expressions are to be copied by the painting rank and file and distributed throughout the country. So far, however, this regimentation has been sporadic and unsuccessful. Individuality still persists, and there remains a market in the periodicals and magazines for an artist who has something definite to express. Nevertheless, the habit influence is beginning to make itself felt. The admirable photographs in the Soviet

pamphlets, perfect from a technical point of view, have a mechanized effect that stultifies the imagination and depresses emotional contact. Long rows of women workers, with the same ironed-out kind of face, void of individual expression, and squads of men reminiscent of the figures in the German film *Metropolis*, feature the proletarian type out of all recognition.

Architecture, however, varies. In some cases the new buildings, stark in outline, purist in design, are supremely effective. In others the general effect is as depressing as the dreadful human rabbit-hutches which disfigure our own industrial Midlands—mean, servile, void of any possible ideal.

In the country, however, the traditional architecture—sloping roofs, rounded cupolas—still persists. Even the tenements on the Collectivist communas have an air of spaciousness in keeping with the long lines of the flowing landscape. Indeed, the old human contacts still remain through all the swift mutations and restrictions of the new forms.

The future of the cities, the ultimate shape of their social life, the final adjustment of caste and class, seems to me far more uncertain than the settlement of the country. The contrast between life as a working shareholder on a farm and a wage slave in a State office is the measurement of the difference between contentment and radical dissatisfaction. But under the influence of the ever-growing Young Communist Party, who perpetually recruit the Civil Service and as inevitably abate their Spartan self-immolation, the

THE PENALTY OF INTELLECT

cast-iron differentiation between the *intelligentzia* and the proletariat must, I think, be loosened.

As it is, I can visualize no more grinding routine, no more wearisome outlook, either in office or store, than that of the Soviet clerk, who has lost his first enthusiasms and finds only an automatic reaction, unlightened by the amenities of a comfortable home life, uncheered by the conviviality of friendly gatherings. That this persistent repression can continue I do not believe, nor do I see why some method of establishing a commercial communa, run by working shareholders for the public service and their own profit, could not be established. The State could sell the goods—clothes, food, merchandise—at a flat rate, as in the case of the Collectivist farms. The communa retailing at the store prices could pocket the difference and increase or lose business according to the managerial talent.

The city Co-operative Stores are frankly hopeless, and display neither energy nor initiative. Their attitude is inevitable in the absence of competition, and their windows, like melancholy tombstones, bear witness to the sterility of State control as opposed to the blossoming of Collectivization. Once, however, a system were inaugurated which, while preserving the sole right of the Soviet to exploitation, enunciated the principle of co-operative profit, one of the chief causes of city discontent would vanish. The ambitious youth with plenty of ideas would find himself, like his country cousin, able to profit by his wits as well as by his work, and under freedom to develop

exchange and barter, even in the present limited form, would quicken to fresh life.

It may be that when the Soviet's devouring appetite for tractors has been satisfied, and the gigantic and terrifying dream of the Five Years Plan has come through, the ordinary citizen will be permitted to enjoy a motor-car. This, at least, is the hope of the officials in the big towns, and with the advent of cars will come furniture, boots, clothes, all the accessories to civilization which the people for so long have been without.

The medical man or woman, as apart from the official, has a slightly freer life, and may come and go among their fellows without question. Sickness is a passport to unrestricted transit even in Soviet Russia, and the little black bag is a sufficient answer for the most inquiring OGPU.

Professional manners also are un-Bolshevist in the matter of courtesy. The doctrine of equality, as we noticed everywhere, has pushed out sex consideration from the officials as from the working classes. That a woman should be given a less arduous job, a more comfortable seat, because she is a woman literally does not enter the Bolshevik mind, male or female, though the national masculine reaction generally shows itself in the case of foreigners. We took it for granted that we should be treated politely, and as an overwhelming rule we usually were. Chivalry, however, is always stimulated by sartorial effects, and perhaps when the Russian woman, after the Five Years Plan—the refrain has taken the place of “when the Revolution

THE PENALTY OF INTELLECT

comes"—has once more command of pretty clothes and soft furs the male may come to social heel again.

As it is, in the rough and tumble of the cities only the fittest of the feminine gender succeed in gaining foothold on the trams or in the trains. The rest are pushed back till they attain sufficient strength or cunning to try their luck again.

But in the country the old, sweet deference of man to woman still blooms.

Chapter XIII

THE SOUL OF THE SOVIET

WHATEVER the uncertainty of Soviet development in other directions, Collectivization in the country is steadily progressing. According to the figures given me, in 1928 some 500,000 peasant households had been collectivized, and it was thought that by the following year this figure would rise to about 1,000,000, which again by 1930 would be doubled. This rate of progress, however, did not satisfy the Kremlin. The process was speeded up by force of arms, and, as we have seen, completely collapsed. Stalin learned his lesson, however. The steam-roller of Collectivization eased down; indeed, if it had not done so there would have been little livestock left. And now the formation of communes goes on by an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary process. It is estimated that to-day there are some 7,000,000 households in Collectivist farms, and that this number will slowly but perceptibly increase each year.

This combination of individualism and co-operation is eminently suited to the Russian temperament, and I can foresee the time when the solitary worker on his plot of ground will be almost entirely obliterated. For side by side with the establishment of the big communes there is a subsidiary form of Collectiviza-

tion under which the peasants, while they pool their labour, their machinery, and their beasts, retain the individual ownership of their cottages and even their orchards.

As I see the situation, there must come a time when the two forces, Communism, as practised in the cities, and Collectivization, as established in the countryside, must arrive at a compromise. It is undoubtedly Stalin's hope and intention to force Collectivization, with its concession of individual increment—to give way to a system of Communism under which all tokens, metal or paper, will be abolished, and the needs of each individual supplied from Government stores by ration-cards. But here, I think, when the moment comes he will modify his intent. For in spite of the persistent enforcement of abstinence, the almost religious ecstasy of denial, the dictator through his agents is in close touch with the general feeling of the people, and as he changed his policy before when public opinion was against it, so, I think, he will alter again when he discovers himself up against the inherent hunger of the Russian for the fruits of his labour on the land.

Ultimately the Collectivist farms will have considerable power and exercise great influence, politically and economically. The Soviet, however, safeguards itself in the possession of the land, which cannot pass from State ownership, and may be, if the Soviet thinks fit, transferred from one group to another, or requisitioned as a State proposition.

In the Ukraine alone there are hundreds of

MY RUSSIAN VENTURE

Collectivist farms whose internal economy is entirely in the hands of their elected representatives. Nowhere, I should say, all over Russia has the Soviet system been more justified than in this most beautiful and luxuriant country. The Ukrainians are a fine people, physically and mentally. Their roots go deep into history; they have an overweening pride in their native arts, crafts, and general culture, all of which they are permitted—more, encouraged—to develop to the utmost. Local patriotism runs at a high pitch throughout the Republic, and it is with a sense of territorial prestige that they make their contribution to the U.S.S.R. Shortage of food does not press on the communes. They feed themselves first and sell to the Government after, and, for the rest, native industry still supplies clothes for Sundays and festal occasions.

Unlike the White Russians, who, in contrast with the White Ruthenians just across the border, endure incomparably worse conditions, the Ukrainians on the Russian side compare quite favourably with their Polish brothers. It is a natural heartache on both sides that this fine people should be divided, and persistent if futile desires for coalition explain the unrest upon the Polish border. But this again springs from the inheritance of the old *régime*. For what Tsarist Russia did generations back Soviet Russia, like Poland, has to suffer to-day.

The enormous spurt in agricultural development since the beginning of the Five Years Plan will be realized when it is remembered that prior to 1928

THE SOUL OF THE SOVIET

tractors and similar machinery were few and far between. At present, even in its initial stages, the smallest communa can obtain all the necessary means of effective development without any difficulty. It is necessary only to fix up the hire-purchase agreement, and the reaper, cutter, and binder is forthcoming. Moreover, the sandiest and most desolate spots, given over for centuries to the weeds, are everywhere being reclaimed.

One of the most effective Russian films shows the evolution of Gigant, the biggest wheat farm in the world, consisting of a thousand square miles. You see the vast tracts of Caucasian land, wild, unpeopled, sandy, unfruitful, with occasional patches of long, waving grass-land, incomparably lovely. You are shown the army of tractors ploughing up the acres, stretching for a long line in mechanized activity. Farmhouses, tenements, granaries, spring up upon the screen. You see the fight against winter snow and ice and biting winds. You welcome the sun ripening the long fields to golden corn. Small children feed the chickens, work in the carpenters' shops. Young men and women drive the machinery; the whole waste hums with human energy, the sterile earth bears fruit, and where the rank grass grew ripe ears of wheat are waving.

And what is shown in this film is going on all over Russia, though not at the same economic level. I was informed that Gigant does not pay, but according to criticism this is largely due to ineffective management.

But for one farm that shows a loss there are ten that make profit, and eventually Gigant will come into line, for the Soviet demands interest for any capital advanced, and when interest is not forthcoming the State will foreclose.

There may be, and, according to what I saw and heard and learned, there are, various State departments which are run at a loss. It is even said that the wheat export from certain districts has been on the wrong side of the balance-sheet, but though one item may fall short ten others will show large profits, and what the Soviet loses on the swings it will more than make up on the roundabouts.

Moreover—and this, I think, impressed me as much as anything else—the complete elimination of the middleman has enormously cheapened the cost of all commodities. It is this factor which the majority of people here at home do not seem fully to realize. The fact that the Russian proletariat and the peasantry live hard, sleep hard, and generally exist at a very low level does not wholly explain why Russia can market her goods more cheaply than any other state. In this country a ton of coals can be bought at the pithead for about 20s. It is delivered in London for another 8s.; the ordinary citizen has to pay 45s. to 50s. The difference goes to the middleman—*i.e.*, the agent for the commodity marketed by the mineowner and transported by the railways. In Russia the consumer is in direct contact with the producing agency—the State—who also markets and transports.

I do not wish to minimize the material discomfort and spiritual harrying which the population of the Soviet cities endures, the complete suppression of individual opinion in the Press or on the platform. But above and beyond the lash of propaganda, the standardization of food, is an ideal of economic justice. It is this ideal, and the knowledge that what you endure your neighbour also has to bear, that is the real source of Russia's strength. Conditions, from what I have heard and read, seem to be peculiarly bad in Moscow and Leningrad, to neither of which places did we go. But at the end of our journey, as at the beginning, I realized that the common, everyday life of millions and millions of Russians does not correspond either with the dietetic or political state of these cities. Moreover, you cannot enforce on a whole people conditions which they will not accept. And albeit there is forced labour in circumstances of repression and cruelty, that domiciliary searches and secret arrests are matters of usual occurrence, the fact remains that the great majority of the Soviet population live in hope as in acceptance, confident of the success of the Five Years Plan, and willing and desirous to do all they can to expedite it.

I went to Russia full of keen curiosity as to what was really happening to the men, women, and children in the provincial towns and the countryside. I had no previous conviction for or against the Soviet Government. I desired only to see and hear and judge for myself, without guidance and quite unsupervised. And I have come back firmly convinced

MY RUSSIAN VENTURE

that under her present untiring and nerve-racking discipline the Russian cities may falter, but they will not succumb, and that the vast millions of the countryside, for the first time in the history of the Russian continent, are evolving toward a standard of decent living and a sense of spiritual security that not all the external attacks, political or economic, can disrupt.

But of this I am also sure. Once the Five Years Plan is accomplished Russia, with her unparalleled resources of natural wealth, her teeming millions of population, her up-to-date equipment and machinery, will have economic Europe by the tail. She has only to reorganize her railways, reform her interior means of transport and distribution, to be the most formidable competitor the commercial world has known. Moreover, socially as well as economically, she will be united, for side by side with her Central Government, of which the Kremlin is the symbol and Stalin the High Priest, runs the recognition of self-determination expressed in the local language, arts, and crafts of the five republics, and admitted in the existence of the Collectivist farms, with the individual distribution of profit.

Only slowly is the outside world acknowledging the significance of these two apparently divergent strands inseparably woven into the fabric of the U.S.S.R. The majority of foreigners are content, usually speaking, with a visit to the larger cities. They have not the inclination to explore the interior, and as a consequence the newspapers are full of the activities of the

Ogpu inquisition, so that to the uninitiated the whole area of 8,000,000 miles is enmeshed by a network of persecution and intrigue, and there are very few who have any desire to pierce below the surface of rumour or analyse the reactions of prejudice. It is to me a disconcerting commentary on the attitude of the English mind that, whereas every important American paper has a resident Russian correspondent, the only journal in the British Isles to have a man upon the spot is the *Manchester Guardian*!

As a consequence we hear—and hear rightly—of the harshness of political methods, but we do not hear of the everyday occurrences in the lives of that enormous majority who have never been suspected as counter-revolutionaries, and who continue the simple round, the common task, of normal existence without any undue political tremors or disconcerting fears.

Moreover, it is a trite saying, but so often overlooked that it calls for repetition, that though the standard of living be low under the Soviet, it was infinitely lower under the Tsar. For whereas now there are still hundreds of families living like pigs, they have the sure and certain hope that the Five Years Plan will bring them better dwellings—a hope that never glimmered through the darkness of the old, bad days.

Godlessness is not rampant in the countryside, nor in the provincial cities and small towns. Stalin is not so intoxicated with power that he cannot see reason. There will be no annihilation of religion,

no wholesale destruction of churches or synagogues. Priests have been and are arrested. In Moscow and Leningrad, one gathers, there are hardly any left! But the fact remains that at the close of every week, throughout the length and breadth of the U.S.S.R., the ancient Church holds immemorial service, and for four hours the people pray and praise and praise and pray.

Not in the capitals, perhaps, but, as I have witnessed, in country town and village, God is still enthroned, worshipped by greybeard and baby. And side by side with the old religion is the new faith, which in its call for self-sacrifice, denial, unceasing effort, untiring devotion, is akin to Christian dogma, and which you feel in the Young Communists who, like the martyrs, glory in their stripes.

There is another point which, at the risk of repetition, I feel should be stressed. There still remains within the Soviet network room for the little people, those small craftsmen and individual temperaments who cannot fit in a new world of civic regimentation. You may still be your own master, whether it be in the cobbling of shoes, the sewing of coats, or the making of bread, and you may sell the fruits of your labour at the price you can get for it. It is part of the endless contradictions and temperamental fascinations of Russia that these chinks in the economic armour continually appear. Moreover, while the State Publishing Board, the State Art Board, and the rest of the company of Marxist pabula solemnly exist, there remain ways and means by which you may find avenues of expression outside their jurisdiction. It is

still within the compass of the local committees affiliated to the Executive Committee for each republic to employ local talent in design. Thus we find embellishments of carving on some of the new buildings, while poems and illustrations which would never be awarded a State commission appear in the local news sheet run by every separate bank, store, or office. There is considerable competition among these various little journals. In some cases the paper is technically quite good, with excellent make-up, and containing all the latest figures as to trade, with special notes as to the abilities of the employees. They are run on the lines of the house magazines issued by some of the big London stores and banks.

Other news sheets are quite rudimentary, run off by hand on a copying press; but there is real and legitimate pride in every one of them, and you may still find the shy flower of sentiment scattered in their pages. I brought back specimens of these productions which were translated here in London.

In the same way, while the theatre is State-run and State-owned, there are numbers of amateur dramatic societies who always welcome local talent for playwriting and production.

In the country these associations flourish considerably, linking up one village with another, and throughout the Ukraine there is a common centre of fellowship which has its repercussion throughout the autumn and the winter and in the summer evenings when the day's work is done.

I have always found, in whatever country I have

been, a perpetual reduplication of village life. In London, Bloomsbury, Fleet Street, and Soho all have their separate and intensive activities, their peculiar interests, while the flow of friendly gossip is contained in purely local channels. And this, we discovered, was equally true of Russia: on the one hand a vast machinery of Government control; on the other the personal relationship, the traditional ties, the persistent expression of the people, who, rooted in the soil, retain at once the tenacity of deep-growing things with their sudden and spontaneous blossoming.

Chapter XIV

THE SHADOW OF THE ROBOT

SINCE man first was in the most trying circumstances and divergent climates Eve has always contrived for herself an effective setting. The South Seas beauty with her tropical fruit and flowers, the little Eskimo in a snow-hut, like the most modern *mondaine*, will arrange a domestic background so that the most emancipated mind instinctively associates woman with home. The busiest, the most successful, among us, keep a special niche where we can indulge our thoughts, spread our wings, and preen our feathers—grey or gleaming—until the very atmosphere, saturated with our individual reactions, intensely influences the male. A place of one's own, harried womanhood's immemorial cry, finds an echo in every female heart.

Stripped of her domestic privacy, with its tiny and precious personal things, forced to adopt the social standardization which covers the most intimate details, what will poor Eve do?

That is the question that haunted me continually in Russia.

The woman of the countryside still retains the abiding things of home. It is in the city that the Soviet *régime* tells most heavily.

The question of clothes, for instance, has a far-

reaching influence. It is, indeed, an interesting speculation as to just how feminine psychology will be influenced by the almost total disappearance of pretty garments. The immediate manifestation seems to be a lack of vanity, which is a good or bad thing, according to the point of view. Personally, I regard vanity as one of the most important attributes of woman. It is the immediate expression of that self-respect which will polish the uppers of a pair of shoes of which the soles are threadbare; that will wear a shabby hat at a jaunty angle, and use with discretion powder, rouge, and lipstick to cover the ravages of time or fatigue. Vanity keeps you aware of your own sartorial shortcoming, in comparison with your neighbour's, and prevents that down-at-heel mentality which tragically overtakes so many women of middle years.

We found little of this awareness in Russia. There is no eager craning of the neck, no sudden fixation of the eyes on another woman's get-up. Curiosity has gone by the board, for the full extent of every one's resources has been too fully plumbed. Sonia has as much or as little as Masha, and money and position are no longer counters in the game of fashion, for fashion there is none.

But even if a woman in the town or city contrives in some wily way to evolve a pretty frock she has little opportunity to revel in her finery. She may call down the censure of the Soviet. She is attempting to assert her *ego* against the consensus of opinion.

On the other hand, Russian women, as we found

them, have notably well-kept heads; their shingle or bob is brushed and burnished. But here again is little scope for individuality. There is a dreadful tendency to hair-standardization, which somehow produces a curious multiple of regulated personality. Women no longer try for new effects; they simply are not concerned to look original. Competition, the main source of woman's sartorial striving, has been ruled out.

"It is, of course, delightful to have pretty things, but then we are all in the same position, and one does not worry about an old coat or dress when every one else is equally shabby. You see, there is no chance or opportunity for envy. Not any one of us can get more than the other."

I can see Miranda now as she put the case to me; her own slender resources deftly adapted, she simply obliterated from her consciousness the shabby shoes and all but dilapidated raincoat.

This absence of rivalry exists not only in relation to clothes, but in other social aspects. Emotional pettiness has to a large extent been eliminated. There are no heart-burnings because A has been asked to C's party and B has been left out—for no parties are given. The loss of domesticity, as we understand it, has driven woman out of her protective shell right into the open, but in the process of what many may call her liberation she has shed some of the most feminine attributes of her sex. Of social entertainment, as we know it, there is none. Public congresses have taken the place of private gatherings; Communist meetings,

MY RUSSIAN VENTURE

proletarian rallies, have supplanted balls and other festivities. You cannot arrange a rag at the club; the rank and file must not be incommoded for the convenience of a group of members; moreover, the proceeding would be regarded as waste of energy, mental and physical. There is no time for play until the Five Years Plan, which is to bring prosperity, comfort, and luxury to Russia, has been accomplished.

In the pursuance of health and general fitness, however, athletics are standardized and games encouraged to the *n*th degree, and when the spirit moves them bands of students may break into a spontaneous dance. But this particular expression of the joy of life is found most often in the country, where the peasants still retain the native grace, which in sudden fire breaks into a whirling ecstasy of motion.

Hiking progresses universally throughout the U.S.S.R. Groups of women, apart from hundreds of families, traverse the country, students, workers, all of them in the stereotyped drabness of attire, all of them with the same tensivity of expression, the same sudden outbreaks of enthusiasm.

The young girl in Russia has a most vital and most urgent existence. In her teens and early twenties, like a healthy tomboy, she plays hard, but she works hard and enjoys quite unrestricted the society of lads of her own age. Together they study in the high school or the university; eat together, talk—oh, how they talk!—preach Communism up and down the countryside, sleeping in Government houses, student hostels, at home or at a friend's, as the spirit moves

them. Peasant girls from the country, daughters of town-workers, who enjoy the advantages of a university education, pay their way by the aid of the Government subsidy, earning a few extra roubles by working after school hours.

There are no limits to the choice of the Russian girl's profession—politics, medicine, law, engineering, all are open to her. She may even gratify her military ambitions if she be so inclined, for there are still certain regiments where women comrades are enrolled.

It is amazingly interesting to realize how curiously free the younger generation are from the conventional inhibitions current in Western Europe. Their loyalties, their beliefs, flow outward from the family toward the Soviet. Individual reactions do not modify their general outlook. They do not measure their actions by the effect on isolated human beings; the personal element is subordinate to the communal. To sacrifice for the cause is in itself a compensation for mortification of the body or the spirit.

To them sex—love and marriage—is incidental. A husband is not a determining factor of life. Even motherhood is but an incident. It is matter for the most stimulating speculation as to the mould in which the maturity of these amazing young people will set, and how far the feminine predisposition, as we know it, toward personal expression will affect their ultimate psychology.

At the moment one feels a very definite distinction between the girl in the twenties, with her intellectual

ebullience, her ruthless enthusiasm, and the woman who has turned into her thirties.

She has been caught between two forces; young enough to react to the immediate fervour of the time, she cannot entirely shake off the influence of the past. She has reached an age when in most countries she would have stabilized her life, looking forward to a certain measure of attainment either as wife or mother, or in the success of her own career. But in Russia to-day there is no such fruition.

Home, as we understand it, is no more in the cities. The mother is not primarily mistress of her household, concerned with the comfort of the family, the arrangement of the meals, the entertainment of the guests. She is a unit in a vast machine, and lives not in her own domain, devised for her use and pleasure, but in a specific area of breathing-space allotted by Government on a basis of so many cubic feet per person. Invariably utilitarian, this living-place offers no inducement, save as a shelter wherein to sleep.

Housekeeping is no longer part of married life. A wife has always been inclined to grumble amiably at the trouble of ordering meals, studying the tastes of her husband, remembering what he likes and dislikes, but to most a considerable blank would be felt if there were no longer the power to choose, if every individual shop suddenly vanished. But with the destruction by the Soviet of private ownership this is what has happened. Vast Government stores, with the same goods at the same prices, force an unsatisfying routine. At first sight woman, generally speaking, would joyfully

THE SHADOW OF THE ROBOT

acclaim an existence which relieves her from the trouble of managing servants or doing the work herself. But the Russian only exchanges domestic ties for Government responsibility, and at the end of the day there is no cosy little place to return to, but only the big club with its standardized menu for which she must wait hours on end. It is no use for her, tired with the rush of the office, to complain of bad service. She is powerless to upset the machine of which she is a part. Useless to urge that you are in a hurry; you cannot be swifter than the Government, which up to the present is unable to arrange a system under which you may hope to get your meals in a reasonable time.

Marriage for a woman at this age must be fraught with anxiety. The young girl has no cause to fear loneliness because she or her husband may decide to register divorce. There will most certainly be other opportunities for a new partner, and as the younger generation are growing up in the belief that matrimony need not be regarded as permanent, they will not necessarily suffer from this change in moral outlook. It does not seem to me that there is any danger that promiscuity will become a general habit. Liberty to change in many cases stabilizes choice. But for the older woman divorce must more certainly mean the end of her sex chapter, and the shadow of separation hangs over her life. Even if she find another mate she will be void of that assurance in her own ability to hold him which to her is half the battle.

The men in the thirties do not suffer in the same

way. But woman, as by Nature ordained, is sexually the elder, and whatever compensation she may find in the future this consciousness remains in her to-day.

Children, again, are but fleeting factors in her life. She sees less of them than most mothers in other countries, and they go out into the world at a far younger age, and with a far more independent spirit. This is all to the good for them, but it leaves the woman of middle age terribly shorn of those compensations which maturity usually brings.

Professionally as domestically speaking a tragic acceptance, an almost listless acquiescence seems to fall on the Russian woman of middle life. If she be the head of a department she will enjoy a salary which will ensure the meagre standard of life under Soviet rule. But, apart from the purchase of necessities, there are very few avenues of expenditure. She cannot go abroad—the ordinary citizen has the greatest difficulty in securing permission to leave the U.S.S.R.—nor can she tour her own country in the comfort of a car. The individual may not possess a motor—these are reserved for Government use. Correspondence must be discreet, for too great an interest in personal matters argues a lack of Communistic concentration; the shadow of the censor hangs over every city, one never knows where it may fall. Music still remains a solace; the orchestral concerts of the Soviet are magnificent in technique and admirable in choice. It is, perhaps, the one department of life in which the *bourgeois* is admitted.

To the woman, however, who is conscious of a

faculty for organization outside the State there is practically no scope. Social work, as we understand it, does not exist, and this, while it engenders a very healthy feeling of equality, leaves some of the finer flowers of feminine kindness to wither. Young girls are in no need of guidance or help from older and more experienced women; they learn from their own hurts.

I was curious to discover if there were any channel through which the young country girl newly arrived in the city could be given a helping hand. In the case of the university student matters arrange themselves—she simply joins her fellows. But even in Soviet Russia we find types of womanhood who turn naturally and contentedly toward domestic work. It is still possible to hire a fellow-citizen to clean or cook or mind the children so long as her services are confined to the members of the family employing her. There is no such thing as a private boarding-house in Russia: if you take a lodger you must wait on him; another's labour must not be exploited for your monetary gain. There are, however, no hostels or lodging-houses specifically designed for the young country girl. When she comes to town she may, and sometimes does, through sheer ignorance and unhappy circumstance, become a prostitute. There are, however, certain houses where these little daughters of joy may be transformed from bad citizens to worthy members of the community. I use the term bad not in the moral sense, but in the economic. In these houses prostitutes are trained to be factory-workers,

and medical treatment is included in the *régime*. These establishments, however, are State-run, and the woman who yearns to salve another's hurts can find no individual channel of social assuagement.

Religion still remains. A woman may be married in church, with all the panoply of gorgeous music, the incense, the unearthly beauty of the Russian choirs, and if she wishes she may practise the ritual of her faith, go to confession, and attend Mass. But even this consolation in the city must be sought with discretion. Moreover, to participate in the services in a place of worship more clearly marks out the distinction between Communist youth and the woman of an older growth.

The individual genius in Russia, as elsewhere, will always make her own path no matter at what age. But for the average Russian woman the future cannot appear either stimulating or assured. For the young all barriers have broken down; diplomatic, economic prizes are within reach. But for those others whose maturity has come too late for them to reap the advantages of the new generation there seems but little chance of readjustment. Uncertain in marriage, with the knowledge that her children will, at the earliest opportunity, sever their filial ties, without the hope of individual success or the prospect of economic advancement; for them the U.S.S.R. is a sad and a solitary place.

And, indeed, so far as I could observe, the number of women who hold responsible positions under the Soviet forms a very small percentage. There is, I

understand, no woman Minister at the Kremlin of national importance, and as yet her diplomatic promotion does not generally reach ambassadorial eminence. This, of course, may be attributed to the prejudice of those older nations not in favour of feminine envoys. But the lack of female pre-eminence holds good throughout the Russian social fabric. It is the women who fill the pedestrian positions in the banks and in the stores, and as yet no woman has been elected manager of a communa.

But, so I heard on all sides, this will all be remedied with the passing of a few years. As soon as the university youth attain their majority woman will come into her own. For to the girl of that period there will be no memory of pre-revolutionary days. She will grow up untouched by individual tradition, unhampered by the agelong inhibitions of her sex.

Will this be to the general advantage of the country ?

It is a question to which the answer should prove the keynote of the Russia of the future, the Russia who hopes to achieve the Five Years Plan, industrializing the whole country and at the same time eliminating the small homes and first beginnings of her people.

Chapter XV

BACK TO THE OLD WORLD

Do not hurry to get up," said Miranda, in a note which I still cherish. "The train to Mohylandy is seven hours overdue. We shall not have to start until two in the afternoon."

The message, however, was not transmitted in time to give us an extra snooze, and we came down blinking at 7.30 to find the hotel completely somnolent. It was much too early for the staff to supply us with tea, and the whole place seemed tragically empty and forlorn. We trailed out unhappily to take our last walk through the town, said farewell to the Proletarian Park and St Sofia, and returned at midday to indulge in an omelette, rich and most expensive, with a glass of Pilsener, and to arrange provisions for the journey.

Miranda had promised to meet us at the station. Meanwhile the pretty guide took us under her wing, and we found ourselves in the motor-bus immediately behind the grey lady. Bunny's forebodings were realized. We were all packed together in the same soft seats. But the aloofness of our cat-owner was tempered by the presence of a Pole and a German travelling to Warsaw.

We said good-bye to Miranda in the corridor, and as a last token of friendship she presented us with two wooden bowls to match our spoons, eloquently expres-

sive of the art of her beloved Ukraine. The train, suddenly grown fussy, started off; we waved from the windows, straining to catch a last glimpse of Miranda's melancholy eyes and sensitive mouth smiling from under her straw hat.

Conversation started briskly as soon as we were off. The German, a tall, round-headed, genial creature, with English picturesquely broken, insisted that we should form ourselves into a *Gesellschaft*, incorporating the Pole as an auxiliary. He talked incessantly, and by sheer weight of words thawed the grey lady until she became quite human, and conversed with him in his native tongue. Meanwhile we carried on with the aid of pantomime and a Polish-English dictionary. It was a polyglot assemblage.

We discovered that, void of the driving-power of Cyrus, his mistress's will-power wilted. She was absolutely inoperative in the matter of getting her wants supplied, and but for the united efforts of the *Gesellschaft* must have gone without the glasses of hot water which she thirsted for at every stopping-place *en route*. The country flowed past the windows in all its rich luxuriance of crops and forests, hill-side and pleasant village, small town and Collectivist farm. Darkness fell rapidly that afternoon; the rain hung like a veil over the landscape, and suddenly I felt the Russia we had so adventurously met was fading from view.

My last glimpse of the Ukraine was of a siding where stalwart peasants were loading up huge railway trucks with gigantic cabbage and beet. The peasants

were working with a will, the trucks bursting with produce, but the prospect of their removal was, I knew, extremely vague. In all probability the stuff would go rotten and decay before the railway system of the U.S.S.R. was alive to its existence.

Land of bewildering contrasts, incredible divergencies, its integral force is so vital, its ideals so strong, that it will, it must, weather all the amazements and decrepitudes of its immediate condition.

The grey lady grew more unbendsive as the shades of evening gathered, and inquired as to the resources of Poland in the food line. We were able to assure her that as soon as we reached the frontier we should pass to a land of plenty, and descanted on the white bread, the butter, the new-laid eggs and ham, the delicious cream and coffee, that would await us. It was long after midnight when at last we reached the frontier customs house, where we checked up the money we had left with the amount we had taken in, and changed it back to English and American currency. The same rate of exchange was observed. For eight roubles fifty we received a pound note, or its equivalent, in any coinage we preferred. The customs officials were more deliberate and less linguistic than at Negoreloje. The grey lady expected an Intourist guide to meet her at this point. But he was not visible, and her insistent demands fell unheeded on the air. Afraid of leaving us to look for him, and at the same time loth to trust herself to our pantomimic care, she remained stationary and distressed, while Herr Gesellschaft, who wished to wire to his

friends, shouted *télégraphique* in every intonation. It was more than an hour before we staggered back into the train, which continued on its way a short distance over the border into Polish territory.

No sooner had we taken our seats than we were conscious of a sudden and at the moment a rather stimulating change. The Bolshevist official had given place to a Polish officer, smart, well-groomed, efficient, magnificently uniformed, and with a gleaming sword! He inspected our passports, clicked his heels, and bowed, and in a few minutes we stopped short at the little town of Mohylandy.

And there it seemed we were to spend the remainder of the night. We should properly have made the connexion hours before—at 8 P.M.—but, as usual, the Russian train was late; it was now just on 3 A.M.

Poland has no use for the vagaries of the Soviet railways. If the Bolshevist trains keep time, well and good. If not, then passengers must wait for the next. There are only two a day—morning and evening. We were dog-tired, and did not relish sleeping in the station, though we felt it was inevitable. But we were now in Poland. Such discomforts could not be permitted to her guests, and we were conducted to a little inn where soft beds awaited us. We slept profoundly, and only waked at the thumping of the station porter, who, almost to our surprise, waited to transport our luggage. In the little inn coffee-room we found Herr Gesellschaft, who had ordered a marvellous meal for every one, seated at the head of the table, while he waved the grey lady to the other end

and addressed her as "Mama." I must say she took it in good part, though it would have been difficult for anyone coming out of Russia to be unamiable in the face of Polish food.

Everything tasted impossibly delicious—ham and honey, coffee and cream, fresh, crisp white rolls and luscious butter. They wiped out the memory of the rye bread and tea, life's chief sustenance across the border. Hot water in plenty and all the accessories of civilization sent us on our journey in immense good humour. We lost our Pole, but the German still remained.

He was a bright and very amiable soul, but as we passed through Galicia with its innumerable battle-fields he grew suddenly excited.

"I fought all over this country in the War!" he exclaimed. "Look! Look! I was at this very place. Yes, this was the spot. We took hundreds of prisoners here." The light of conflict flashed into his eyes. He recalled the batches of wounded—one felt he saw the whole scene re-enacted. The memory of his experience induced a kind of blood-lust which, mounting to his brain, resulted in a pæan on the general slaughter all along the line. I did not mind his enjoying his own particular blood-lust if it gave him any satisfaction, but what struck me as queer was his determination to share his enthusiasm with the Polish guard, whom he frantically embraced.

"My dear fellow, I fought all over this district. Here we wiped out a whole battalion. My dear fellow, what a fight!"

The unfortunate guard, who had also been a soldier, but on the other side, disengaged himself, saluted gravely, and firmly departed, to the chagrin of poor Herr Gesellschaft, who for the moment had quite forgotten he had been addressing an old enemy.

We had our first *table d'hôte* lunch for many a long day at a big railway station. Here the grey lady was a little trying. She was a passionate vegetarian, and looked displeasure at the sight of the succulent spring chickens on our plates. She would have potatoes. But not *sauté*, like ours—plain, but, alas! not boiled. A kind of mashed variety was procured, but the dish was returned, and she fell back on an omelette, which, however, she did not explain should be savoury. The delicious *confiture*, with fruit on top, roused her to anger, and she was just on the point of sending that back also when the head of the *Gesellschaft*, with real pity for the distressed waiter, seized it and wolfed it up. Poor little woman, nothing was right! Poland was just as wrong as Russia, and although she could not speak Polish and the waiter did not understand much German, it seemed to us that her irritation was excessive. Moreover, she had a complete contempt for pantomime. She finally finished up on bread and butter and milk, declining to wait for a dish of eggs. She had a bad headache in consequence, and looked really suffering for the remainder of the journey. She could not even sleep in peace, for as we neared Warsaw the train filled up, the corridors grew crowded, and everybody talked. We made friends with a very charming Pole who spoke perfect English and was

taking his young daughter to the south. He also knew Russia, and congratulated us on our immunity from Ogpu. We gathered that he had not been quite so fortunate.

We got into Warsaw—it was like coming home—and at about ten o'clock that evening the whole *Gesellschaft* saw the grey lady into a taxi, and we packed ourselves into another, saying farewell with mutual friendship and regret. We felt somehow that we had known each other for years. There is nothing more binding than mutual discomfort and the sudden return to more genial conditions.

The Crakovski Pzerdmeice was dazzling with its lamps, the people at the Europieski welcomed us with open arms. But their eyes could not leave the poor Rabbit, who was still encased in bandages, and presently the hall porter, he who had superintended our departure, broke into peals of merriment.

"The Bolsheviks will not allow you to take from their country more than you take in, eh? But you have done it! You have brought back some little things?"

We assured him that it was merely the scars poor Bunny bore—the foe had been left behind upon a stricken field. All the same, he inquired immediately if we should like a bath, telephoned for one to be made ready, and, with a touch of welcome we intensely appreciated, gave us the rooms we had before occupied.

"You are home," he said, and when we found our way into the charming little suite with reading-lamps,

cosy beds, telephone and bathroom attached, it was like the prodigal's return.

We dressed that evening as though for a *fête*—though Bunny clung tightly to a coatee—and went over to the jolly little restaurant of Simon Stecki, where you will always find a crowd of Pressmen, black-and-white artists, and clever caricaturists. And as we ate duck and green peas, sipped a divine Moselle, and finished up with some of Poland's choicest liqueurs, we appreciated to the utmost the advantages of the Capitalist system!

And yet there remained the consciousness that we had left behind us, over that frontier of barbed wire and blockhouses, a passionate faith which through all the cruelty, oppression, and injustice of its working still reaches out toward a goal that leaves the gospel of old Europe far behind. We had eaten the bread of Russian penury, but we had savoured also the fruits of Russian comradeship, and we had felt the stirrings of her mighty spirit struggling to be free. It is this struggle which seeks not to crucify but to exalt the humble of the earth that holds the envy, the curiosity, the imagination, of the world—a struggle that cannot be ignored, will not be evaded, and which must continue till the rest of Europe comes to grips with its philosophy.

The thought of those teeming millions, barefoot but invulnerable, persisted through all the pleasantries and facilities of our easy travel home. It seemed impossible, remembering the hot blast of Soviet zeal, the fierce martyrdom of the Young Communists, the urge

MY RUSSIAN VENTURE

of the new towns, the bourgeoning of the countryside, that life should continue in the old, easy-going way, accepting if not confirming unemployment and bad housing, exploitation and waste land, as inevitable acts of God!

And so by easy stages back to the grey streets of London, their busy current flowing placidly, their security unravaged, their atmosphere of permanence unbroken.

And now once more under a system of parliamentary representation and capitalist economics our Russian venture flames like a torch against a clouded sky. What I saw and felt and actually encountered makes for me a sum-total of experience unmatched in unexpectedness and possibility. It shook all my convictions, predispositions, and assurances to their foundations.

It is the custom to dismiss the Soviet system as visionary or condemn it as diabolical. Rarely is it regarded as a new and resurgent force, with dynamic potentialities.

But for myself, whether the Five Years Plan goes through within the stated time or its fulfilment is held up till later, I am convinced that it will eventually be accomplished. It is my opinion that the Soviet will achieve its purpose and industrialize the whole of the U.S.S.R. But—and on this I am prepared to stake my whole experience and my knowledge of human nature—while Bolshevism may standardize the cities, it will leave unfettered the workings of that Col-

BACK TO THE OLD WORLD

lectivization found in the ever-increasing comunas, which, with their abolition of exploitation and assertion of individual rights and liberties, are the finest expression of a fundamental Communism.

It is a weariness at times to feel that the accretion of years of waste energy, which is what unemployment really means, is settling yet more firmly on England's shoulders, while a life-and-death struggle for a new distribution is waxing to white heat under the U.S.S.R.—a distribution which, though it harrows body and soul in the process, drives through to an ideal which if it triumphs must either revolutionize or overthrow the whole economic fabric.

A new and a terrific chapter in the history of mankind, Soviet Russia is the writing on Europe's capitalist wall.

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY



140 267

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY